Islam In The Bible



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point

Common beliefs and practices in Islam and Christianity including the concept of God, .Divine Guidance, leadership, prayer, fasting, sacrifice and marriage

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About the Author

Thomas McElwain was born into a devout family in the United States in ۱۹۴۹. He was occupied by religious subjects from an early age and wanted to become a pastor. He studied theology and history at the Seminaire du Salève in France from ۱۹۶۸ to ۱۹۷۲, after which he continued studies in religion at Andrews University in Michigan. Already in France he was considered a rebel in terms of theology, but his expertise in .languages earned him respect

In ۱۹۷۴ he entered the University of Uppsala to study Biblical Languages and Ethnography. He completed a PhD degree in ۱۹۷۹ from the University of Stockholm with a dissertation on American Indian religious traditions, Mythological Tales and the Allegany Seneca. He has written several books and many articles on Native American .religion, Christianity, Judaism and Islam

For many years he has lectured at various universities, especially the University of Turku in Finland where he was active from ۱۹۷۹-۱۹۸۴. He was editorial secretary for the Nordic journal of comparative religion, Temenos, for five volumes. He has been

on the faculty of the department of Comparative Religion as docent at the University .of Stockholm since ١٩٨٢

His active participation in church work led to his ordination to the ministry in ١٩٨٨. He served a Baptist missionary society full time from ١٩٨٦ to ١٩٩٠. He was a voting delegate to the Baptist World Alliance at its session in Zagreb in ١٩٨٩, representing the .Seventh Day Baptist General Conference of USA and Canada

Following the Baptist principles of Bible study, which encourage freedom of thought and objective examination of the text, he has come to conclusions which will surprise the reader no matter what his or her religious background

Introduction

Not only Judaism in its several varieties, but hundreds of different sects of Christianity all maintain that their beliefs and practices are based on the Bible. If so many ?different religions can be justified by the Bible, why not Islam

Most of Christianity recognizes the authority of the Bible, containing the Hebrew and Greek writings. There is some discussion of what writings to include and to what degree they are authoritative, but in principle Christians recognize the Bible. All forms of Judaism recognize the Torah and the other writings of the Tanach, which makes up the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. Islam appeals primarily to the Holy Qur'an, but in principle accepts the Bible. In practice, Muslims reject the Bible on the assump… tion that it is corrupted from the original in order to make it accommodate to Christian .teaching

The problem arises when

we compare the beliefs and practices of any particular religious group with the book it appeals to. Inevitably there is much selectivity and interpretation, but beyond this remains the bare fact that the book is never the sole source of belief and practice. Where would the Christian year of festivals, the liturgy and a multitude of beliefs and practices be if all had to be founded on the Bible? Many of them would sadly fall by the .wayside

The decoupling of books from actual belief and practice first struck me a few years ago when I noticed how the books relate to the day of worship. The Hebrew Scriptures obviously maintain the observance of the Sabbath or seventh day of the week. Jewish tradition quite consistently puts this in practice. The observance of Sunday is characteristic of Christianity. But there is very little justification for this in .the Greek Scriptures, the so-called New Testament

On the contrary, the Sabbath is mentioned very often, sometimes quite favorably. I looked in the Qur'an to see how it dealt with the issue, and found that the Sabbath is maintained on a half-dozen occasions in the Qur'an as well. Friday prayer is also well established in the Qur'an, unlike Sunday in the New Testament, which can only be defended by doing violence to the text. But there is no Qur'anic justification for observing Friday as a special day from Thursday evening, as many Muslims do. We thus find the Sabbath to be a feature common

to all of the sacred books. By contrast, the traditions vary on how they relate to the Sabbath, Judaism observing Saturday, Christianity Sunday, and Islam Friday.

By way of experiment I began to think how the Scriptures align themselves with the beliefs and practices of the various traditions. There might well be more features supporting Judaism in the Qur'an than mere reference to Saturday observance, and on the other hand, more features supporting Islam in the Bible than special recognition of Friday. Since Muslims generally do not know the Bible well, there is every reason to believe that they might be mistaken when they think the Bible supports Christianity. In sum, one question seems never to have been answered: how do Islamic belief and practice compare to the texts of Judaism and Christianity, that is, to the Bible?

I first came to the conclusion that the Bible might reflect Islamic features in unexpected ways through a reading of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew ۵-۷. A closer look at this text will reveal how the Bible can express Islamic values even on a structural level. This passage contains the texts which the greatest numbers of Christians know by heart.

Some Christian sects, notably those who have descended from the Anabaptists, seem to base the core of their doctrine on this passage alone. The Sermon on the Mount is beloved by Christian and non-Christian alike. The nonreligious person in Christian societies often appeals to its words. It is said that Gandhi based his

.practice of nonviolent resistance on it

Since this is indisputably one of the most important texts of Christianity, we can only wonder how well it supports the basic beliefs of Christianity. Some of the most important beliefs of Christianity are these three: Christians believe that God is one God eternally existing in three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Christians believe that the man Jesus is also in one and the same person at one and the same time completely and wholly God Almighty, one and equal with the .Father

Finally, Christians believe that salvation and correspondingly forgiveness of sins depend on the atoning sacrifice for sin made by Jesus in his death on the cross. By comparison, the well-known five pillars of Islamic practice are: testifying that there is .no god but God; prayer, alms, fasting, and Pilgrimage

The whole Sermon on the Mount implies time and again that there is only one being who is God, the one Jesus calls `Our Father'. Because we live in a world of permissive child-rearing, we fail to notice immediately that the basic relationship referred to is the relationship of submission and obedience. The God of the Sermon on the Mount is one to whom people owe submission and obedience. No trinity is mentioned at all. In no place in Matthew five to seven does Jesus even remotely suggest that he himself is .God Almighty

From the Christian point of view the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus on the cross

for forgiveness of sin is the heart of the Gospel. Jesus does suggest a condition for forgiveness of sin, but that condition is not his vicarious death on the cross. He says that we shall be forgiven as we forgive (Matthew ۶:۱۵), and judged as we judge others .((Matthew ۷:۲

Christians have rightly divided the Sermon on the Mount into three chapters, for it does in fact present three subjects. Belief in the law and the prophets is the subject of chapter five. Certainty of the Day of judgement is the subject of chapter seven. .Chapter six presents the faith of Jesus in practice

Let us first take a look at chapter five. The subject here is to maintain the authority of the law and the prophets. When Jesus spoke to the crowd, he was faced with people who were suspicious of one thing, whether or not he upheld the law. The people had already seen miracles. They were ready to believe in Jesus provided that he could produce evidence that he was loyal to the lain, and that he upheld the Torah, the .books of Moses. This was crucial. Without it he would not be accepted

So Jesus set about the task. First of all he gained the people's confidence by giving a series of blessings. Luke ۶:۲۴-۲۶ adds curses to these. The familiar covenant of blessings and curses, so well known from the book of Deuteronomy, immediately .flooded into his hearers' minds. They were on familiar ground. They felt at ease

Then

Jesus came to the point. `Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.' Matthew ۵:۱۷-۱۹. There it is: Jesus has had his say. Stronger language could not have been invented. In the rest of the chapter he gives illustrations, first from the Ten commandments and then from other parts of the books of Moses. He illustrates .how he supports the law

Modern interpreters might maintain that Jesus gave a new law, because he contrasted what he said with what was said earlier by saying, `But I say unto you...' But when Jesus says that anger is murder, surely no one with good sense will say that he means you can kill people after all as long as you are not angry with them. When he says to look in lust is the same as adultery, only an insane person would say he means that it is all right to go to bed with someone illicitly as long as you do not look at them with lust

first. Jesus does not abrogate the law when he points out its spirituality. He does not .give permission to disobey the law by striking out against hypocrisy

In the same way Jesus supports the law of divorce and oaths. Untold misery has come from Christians who think Jesus abrogated the law of divorce by saying, `Whosoever shall put away his wife causeth her to commit adultery.' In all of his commentaries Jesus is attacking hypocrisy, which is keeping the law in letter, but having altogether different intentions. In this case Jesus is attacking the hypocritical practice in the Near East of marrying with the intention of immediate divorce in order to give a legal face to prostitution. In a society where prostitution is not even given that legal basis, the true teaching here is likely to escape notice. Jesus affirms the law of Moses. He can do nothing else without discrediting himself. He accepts the .legislation on divorce when it is used as originally intended

When it comes to oaths, Christian interpreters have done little better. Jesus again attacks hypocrisy. In Matthew ۲۳:۱۶-۲۳, Jesus tells precisely what kind of oath he is talking about. He is attacking the practice of clothing a lie with an oath that is formally defective. A seller in the market-place might swear by the temple. When an irate buyer returned with a complaint, he would then say, `Oh, I swore by the temple, so it is not binding. If I had sworn by the gold of the

temple, it would have been binding.' Jesus attacks this hypocrisy, and in so doing .upholds the law and acquires the confidence of his listeners

Let us take a quick look at Matthew seven. The chapter shouts the subject from the very beginning. `Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged.' Matthew ٧:١-٢. Jesus gives many valuable hints on how to prepare for the judgement to come. He says to concentrate on yourself rather than on others. Most of us go through life spending a great deal of time talking and thinking about .other people's faults and very little time correcting our own

Jesus is practical and knows what we are like. He says to ask God for help. No one can stand in the judgement without the infinite grace of God. He says that we will be judged according to the law and the prophets and sums up the law and the prophets very neatly. `Do as you would be done by.' Matthew ٧:١٢. He warns us not to follow the crowd. Conformity will only take us to hell (verses ١٣-١٤). He warns us not to be taken in by false prophets and gives a hint on how to know them. He says that pretending to be religious will get you nowhere, but only those who do God's will can be saved in the judgement (verses ٢١-٢٣). All in all, the chapter is about the Day of Judgement and how to prepare

.for it

After establishing his authority on the law and the prophets, and before warning about the Day of Judgement, Jesus gives us a beautiful summary of his own teaching. Matthew six is above all the very teaching of Jesus Christ as presented in the Christian Scriptures. Anyone who truly desires to follow the faith of Jesus Christ can find the .pillars of practical faith right here in this chapter. They are few and simple

Most Christian creeds can be reduced to a few simple pillars, which are: belief in the Trinity, faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ for the forgiveness of sin, the Church as the channel of grace, and the eternal reward. Judaism can be summed up as belief in one God, the Torah, and the covenant of God with the people of Israel. Islam is summed up as confession of one God, daily prayer in prostration, alms in charity, fasting, and pilgrimage. So how does Jesus sum up his faith according to the Christian ?Scriptures

When we turn to Matthew six, the first subject is covered in verses one to four. We may be surprised to find that the first pillar of practice mentioned is giving alms in .charity. Jesus warns us, aptly enough, to avoid hypocrisy in the giving of alms

When we read on, the next pillar of practice appears in verses ۵-۱۵. That second pillar is prayer. Jesus does not tell us here how to pray. All of his listeners already knew this. They knew it from

the law and the prophets. They knew that Daniel prostrated himself in prayer toward the house of God morning, afternoon and evening (Daniel ۶:۱۰). They knew from the Psalms of David, called The Prayers in Hebrew, that prayer should be done at set times in the day and should be preceded by ablutions. They knew from the same Psalms that prayer should be done standing, bowing, and prostrating. They knew that prayer, according to the Psalms, included raising the hands and crying time and again, .'Yigdal Adonai' or in English `The Lord be magnified' or in Arabic `Allahu akbar

What Jesus did tell the people was to avoid hypocrisy in prayer, to pray briefly and simply, and then he gave them a list of appropriate subjects for prayer. The so-called Lord's Prayer is that list. It is not a model prayer to be repeated word for word, or the version of it given in Luke would have been identical. So the second pillar of practice .mentioned in Matthew six is prayer in brevity, simplicity, and lack of hypocrisy

The third pillar in the practice of the faith of Jesus is found in Matthew ۶:۱۶-۱۸. Here he mentions fasting, again with the warning that we must avoid hypocrisy. He does not tell us how to fast. But we already know how to fast, just as his listeners did. Is it the Christian fast of avoiding certain foods? No. It is a fast of total abstention from food and drink, just as Moses did

on the mount (Exodus ۳۴:۲۸). That tradition came unbroken all the way down to Jesus, .who practiced it himself according to Matthew ۴:۱-۲

So far Jesus has attacked hypocrisy in the practice of faith. Now he comes to an entirely different problem. In Matthew ۶:۱۶-۳۴ we are not faced with hypocrisy, which is the plague of almsgiving in charity, prayer, and fasting. We are faced with fear and .excuses. Those are the plagues of pilgrimage

Jesus goes straight to the problem of how to convince people to go on pilgrimage to the house of God as they should by the example of the Christian Scriptures and as they were commanded to do in the law of Moses. The first excuse he meets is, `Somebody might break in our house and steal our silver and gold while we are gone.' Matthew ۶:۱۹-۲۱. The next excuse he meets is, `What are we going to eat and drink on the way? And how am I going to make up the lost time from work? I have to support my family. I have to buy new clothes for the children before school starts and I don't see how we are going to make ends meet. We can't go on pilgrimage this year.' .Matthew ۶:۲۲-۳۴

In sum, Matthew six gives in order four of the traditional Islamic pillars of practice as the very core of Jesus' message. Embedded as they are in the very structure of the passage, they suggest that other parts of the Bible might well

be hiding features that may become clear only as we view them from an Islamic .perspective

Islamic belief and practice are not based on the Bible. They are based on the Qur'an and on the Sunna or example of the Prophet. The confrontation between Christian and Muslim is often largely a confrontation between books. For that reason Muslims assume that the Bible teaches what Christians believe and practice. They very often use the Bible to show that it does not teach Islam and shows evidence of not being .valid

Whether or not the Bible has been corrupted, as Muslim commentators and Christian scholars maintain, is beside the point for the present study. There is no reason why the Bible could not be approached from the opposite angle. The conflict of books is generally a deadlock. A new approach might raise fresh issues among the traditions, and help us to see them in a new light. Does the Bible as we now have it, and as it has been used through centuries of Christian tradition, support Islamic beliefs and ?practices

Some Muslims have appealed to the Christian Scriptures on behalf of their faith to some extent. Most such appeals surround the figure of the final prophet. Since much has been written about this, I have not given it a special chapter here. I shall merely summarize some of the more important arguments that Muslims have traditionally .made

The problem posed here is whether or not the Bible is complete and the faith finished, or

whether it leaves the door open for prophets to come. The Bible on many occasions contends that people who rejected prophets and divinely appointed leaders in their own times, pretending to rely on earlier ones, no matter how valid these might have .been, were lost

Are there any Biblical reasons for rejecting the idea of additions to the canon? Revelation ۲۲:۱۸ appears to be a serious obstacle to addition. `If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.' The answer to this is obvious. These words refer to the whole book that was written in the scroll at hand, that is, the book of Revelation. They do not refer to the addition of more books to the collection of the canon. The book of Revelation itself was accepted in the canon only centuries after it was written. No other Biblical evidence is to be .found against more prophets

On the contrary much warning is given against false prophets and how to recognize them. `For there shall arise a false Christ, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.' Matthew ۲۴:۲۴. If the prophetic revelation were closed, it would only remain to say that anyone claiming to be a prophet is false. The implication is that at least one .more prophet is forthcoming

Those who came to question John the Baptist reveal that the people of the

time knew that another prophet was coming and were expecting him. John ۱:۱۹-۲۵. `And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he said, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What say thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Elias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizes thou then, if thou be not that '?Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet

From this it appears clearly that three figures were expected: the promised Messiah or Christ, Elias or Elijah, and `that prophet'. Although John in his modesty denied it, Jesus later stated that John was the expected Elias (Matthew ۱۱:۱۴). Jesus himself was the expected Messiah or Christ. Who then is the prophet to come? It is a fact that he .does not appear in the Bible. So we must look for him after the time of Jesus

We know that prophets according to the Bible, speak by the inspiration of the Spirit of God. So we can expect to find information

if there is any in the promises relating to the future working of the Spirit of God. The most comprehensive of these are found in John ۱۴-۱۶. Looking through these chapters .the following verses stand out

John ۱۴:۲۶. `But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, '.whatsoever I have said unto you

John ۱۵:۲۶. `But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceeded from the Father, he shall testify of '.me

John ۱۶:۷-۱۴. `Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgement, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify

'.me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you

Now the Spirit of God in the Bible narratives works not in a void but through human beings. This promise refers to a prophet who has ears and a mouth (John ۱۶:۱۳). What do we learn from this prophecy of Jesus about the prophet to follow him? Muslim scholars have pointed out that the Greek word translated `Comforter' is much like the Greek for `Most Praised' or Ahmed, which is a form of the name Muhammad. This .alternative is found in the Gospel of Barnabas and in some Syriac sources

First of all, there is a three-part message. He will reprove the world of unbelief in Jesus Christ. He will bring a message of righteousness that is a renewed regard for obedience to the commandments. He will emphasize the importance of the Day of .Judgement

Secondly, Jesus remarks that there are many things to be said, but he cannot teach his hearers all of these things because they are not yet ready for them. The inference is that the prophet to come will teach some new points of doctrine and practice that the people of Jesus' time were not ready to receive. These things probably have to do with the change of the direction of prayer and place of pilgrimage from Jerusalem to another place, and other details that could not be accepted as long as the temple .existed

Thirdly, the coming prophet would guide into all truth. That is, when

his message is given, there will never be any need for another message, since with his .revelation all truth which God intended to reveal will have been revealed

Fourthly, he will not speak using his own words. He will be verbally inspired. He will actually hear the message of God in spoken form from the angel and will recite verbally what he hears. He will thus be different from some prophets who received .the inspired message and wrote it in their own words

.Fifthly, he will reveal future events

.Sixthly, he will preach the things that Jesus himself taught

It would appear that we have a good deal of information about the prophet to follow Jesus, probably enough to identify him with certainty. Nevertheless, on another occasion Jesus gave still more information. In Matthew ۷:۱۵-۲۰, Jesus points out that `by their fruits ye shall know them.' This is generally thought to refer to actions, bad fruits being evil actions and good fruits good acts. Psalm ۱:۳ describes this prophet `who brings forth fruit in his season.' The book of Revelation suggests that the tree has twelve different fruits (Revelation ۲۲:۲). It is very possible that Jesus is referring to the fact that the prophet to come should have twelve pure descendants or followers who would have authority and act as the final divine guides in their age. We can be sure of this only if we find a prominent contestant for the position of Prophethood who .actually had twelve such descendants or representatives

Contemplation of

the seven criteria shows immediately that most of them are subject to interpretation. It would be easy, for example, to construe the three-pronged message to fit almost any claimant to prophethood. The one criterion which is hard and fast is the prophecy on the means of revelation. We must look for a prophet who heard a voice and .dictated the message word for word

Joseph Smith, for example, claimed to receive the message on golden plates from which he translated in writing. Although he might fit all of the other criteria, he misses .on the most objective one

Ellen White, to take another prominent example, claimed to hear the voice, but she never claimed verbal inspiration, nor did she dictate the message of the angel in a book She wrote her books in words of her own choice. Besides, she, unlike Joseph Smith, was not followed by a succession of twelve. Nor did she herself in fact claim to .be the promised prophet

All of the criteria can be easily fitted to the case of Muhammad. But the one objective criterion, the means of revelation, seems so overwhelmingly appropriate that it is difficult to dismiss it. The story is that Muhammad was praying and meditating in a cave when the angel Gabriel suddenly appeared to him and he heard the words: `In the name of God the most gracious, ever merciful! Recite in the name of thy Lord who creates perfectly. He creates man from a clot. Recite! And thy Lord is the

.most honorable!' Qur'an ٩۶:١-٣

The subject of Biblical prophecy as related to Muhammad is widely dealt with by Ahmed Deedat, Abdul-Ahad Dawud, and many others. I have said little here in addition to such studies and left out much that has been said. I would only add something to Ahmed Deedat's excellent handling of Deuteronomy ١٨:١٨, `I will raise up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.' Christians often claim that this refers to Jesus. But the parallel between Moses and Jesus seems inconsistent, since Christians claim Jesus to be God and deny such status to Moses. If Jesus is God, he is definitely not like Moses and the passage cannot apply to him. If he .is not God, then the Christian doctrine falls

The history of Muhammad is tragic. After the death of Muhammad many Muslims followed unjust and irreligious caliphs. The later caliphs changed the religion to suit themselves. This is recognized by both orientalists and Muslims alike. The family of the prophet's daughter was hounded, persecuted, poisoned and murdered by the so called Muslim State. It is only a miracle that some knowledge of the eleven descendants of the daughter of Muhammad has come down to us. These pure, humble, persecuted people might well be compared to the twelve fruits of the good .tree Jesus mentions in Matthew seven

,Since we are examining the Bible as the traditional

historical text of Christianity I have chosen to use the King James Version in English and the Hebrew Masoretic text and received text of the Greek New Testament from which it was translated. The editions of the latter I have followed are The New Testament, The Greek Text Underlying the English Authorized Version of ۱۶۱۱, Trinitarian Bible Society, London, and Biblia Hebraica,Johanne Leusden, Everardo Van Der Hooght, Judah D'Allemand, London ۱۸۲۲. I have also referred to the Byzantine Greek text in the edition of : "ΤΑ ΒΙΒΛΙΑ, Η ΘΕΙΑ ΓΡΑΦΗ ΤΗΣ ΠΑΛΑΙΑΣ ΤΕ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΙΝΗΣ .ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗΣ", Moscow, ۱۸۴۱

The method will be to examine the whole Bible in terms of the various Islamic beliefs and practices. Critical method will be relevant to the extent necessary to identify Biblical beliefs and practices in context which show similarity or equivalence to Islamic ones. The method is rigorous and scientific, but approaches problems vastly different from those usually examined by scholars. It is not the goal to establish the original or .source text

That would defeat the purpose. What is of interest is to what extent the Bible as it has come down to us through Christian tradition reflects not Christian but Islamic aspects. Such a study would be fortuitous except for the fact that the texts of Christianity and .Islam share a geographical and to a great extent cultural heritage

The examination of the Biblical text will entail first of all the establishment of linguistic equivalents for Islamic features. The second and supporting method

will be to establish conceptual equivalents. The second method obviously lacks the objectivity of the first, but will certainly prove fruitful, as it allows us to bring to bear on each subject texts which may be relevant, but which might be overlooked from a mere linguistic approach. The linguistic approach is used first and primarily in order to .preserve objectivity

Since Islamic approaches to written Scripture make a clear distinction between writings purporting to quote God directly (the Qur'an), and writings purporting to quote human beings (hadith or traditions), I have indicated those distinctions in the use of Bible texts. Texts purporting to be quotations of the very words of God are marked with a star. Strangely that basic distinction is largely overlooked by Jewish .and Christian readers

Judaism and Christianity share many beliefs and practices, some of which are considered fundamental to Islam. Among such fundamental beliefs in common are the belief in Scripture-bearing prophets, angels, and sacred Scriptures as such. The Day of judgement is a belief common to all three traditions as well. These fundamentals are copiously represented in the Bible, and they are the focus of a brief exposition in chapter one. Other aspects are common to all three traditions, but have features which distinguish them within the traditions. It will be of interest to focus on such distinguishing features in order to establish what precisely is described by the .Biblical texts

A study of this kind, because of its pioneering character as well as the limits of time

and space, can only be partial. I cannot examine all of the texts bearing on a subject in detail, or even mention all of them for most subjects. Many questions will remain for further research, but I have tried to touch on the most important ones. I hope that the reader will thoughtfully consider whether or not the Bible supports the basic teachings .of Islam

The best way of establishing Islamic beliefs and practices is to refer to authoritative Islamic texts. I have taken as basic sources Islamic Teachings in Brief by Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, Ansariyan Publications, Qum, Islamic Republic of Iran, translated by Muzhgan Jalali; and the introductory notes of The Holy Qur'an, .S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali, Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, New York, ١٩٨٨

The specific issues I have identified as both representing Islam and showing distinctively Islamic features in contrast to other traditions are the following: the concepts of God and divine guidance, purity, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, sacrifice, polygamy and concubinage. All of these are included in Ali's Introduction to The Holy Qur'an with the exception of polygamy and concubinage (Ali ١٩٨٨:۶٩a, ١٠۴a). He deals with polygamy and concubinage in brief notes on important topics (All ١٩٨٨:١٣٩a, ١۴٠a). .They are all dealt with in detail in Tabataba'i

Beliefs and Practices in Common

The pillars of Islam are well known: belief in God, angels, the prophets, the books of revelation, and the Day of Judgement. These are among the first criteria Muslim scholars use in evaluating the orthodoxy of any movement. The concept of

God is a complicated subject, and is described in some detail in chapter two. There may be some differences in both theological detail and lore relating to angels, but the .basic belief is common to Judaism, Christianity and Islam

Although Muslims accept a number of prophets unknown to Christianity and Judaism, as well as Muhammad, the basic belief in prophets as such is common to all three faiths. Although there is some disagreement about which books are true revelation, not only is the basic belief in written canons a common feature of all three faiths, but .all three believe in at least the Torah or Books of Moses

There are also details of difference regarding the Day of judgement, but it too is a feature of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Therefore we shall merely note briefly the four pillars of belief angels, prophets, books and judgement. They are not only common to all of the faiths, but they are considered fundamental in Islam. These are features of the faiths which are not only a part of belief and practice, but which also appear in the canons themselves. I shall examine a few representative Biblical texts in .order to establish the fact that these four beliefs are expressed in the Bible

Genesis ۲۸:۱۲. `And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.' The knowledge of the existence of angels goes

back to the very beginning. Angels are even mentioned in the story of Adam and Eve (Genesis ۳:۲۴). This verse expresses the role of angels in the communication between .God and humankind

Psalm ۶۸:۱۷. `The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels; the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.' The role of angels as bearers of the universe is expressed in this Psalm. This idea is found in the prophets as well, and has .become a common feature of Bible visionary experience

Psalm ۹۱:۱۱. `For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.' The role of angels in relationship to people is one of divine guardianship. The invisible presence of the angels has as its role not so much the guardianship from danger (as the adversary would have it in Matthew ۴:۶), but the guardianship from .falling into sin. The way in which we are kept is the straight and narrow way

Psalm ۱۰۳:۲۰. `Bless the Lord, ye his angels that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.' The role of the angels is not only to carry out the commands of God, but also to carry out His praise and worship. The continual prostration and praise of some angels is described graphically in .Revelation ۵:۱۱ et al

Psalm ۱۰۴:۴. `Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire.' Human curiosity as to the source of angels in creation is also

satisfied in the Bible. Just as humans have come from spirit and earth (Genesis ۲:۷), so .the angels have come from spirit and fire

Matthew ۱۳:۴۹. `So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just.' The role of angels on the Day of judgement is .an active one in dividing the just from the unjust

Matthew ۱۸:۱۰. `Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.' This warning refers to those who oppress the weak, thinking that they are invulnerable since their victims have no power. In fact, the cry of the oppressed is said to have direct access to God by the angels. The Bible would have us take this into .account in our relations with others

Matthew ۲۶:۵۳. `Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?' The prophets have immediate access to more than twelve legions of angels. It is only amazing that the prophets have shown so much forbearance in dealing with those who not only reject their .messages but even oppresses them

I Corinthians ۱۱:۱۰. `For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.' Human beings are shy in their behavior before other human beings who are visible. The Bible suggests

we should be shyer in our behavior when we are alone, since at such times we are still .visible to the angels

Hebrews ۱:۱۴. `Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who .shall be heirs of salvation?' Angels are spirits sent out to do the will of God

Revelation ۱:۱. `The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.' Messages are brought to the prophets by the .medium of the angels

The central feature of Islamic belief in angels relates to their role in revealing Scripture to the prophets. But the Bible also reflects Islamic belief that the angels are .essentially different from human beings as separate creations

The Islamic idea of being shy in the presence of angels and thus avoiding bad behavior is also Biblical. The angels' action of prostration is both Biblical and Islamic. The Biblical bearing up of the chariot of God is much like the Islamic idea of angels bearing the throne or Arsh of God. All in all, the Biblical passages referring to angels .are well within the Islamic configuration of belief

Angels bring the divine revelation to certain people. Such people are called prophets. The belief in prophecy is basic to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The principle of .prophethood is mentioned in the Bible many times

The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those`

things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do .all the words of this law.' Deuteronomy ٢٩:٢٩

Whether we can do as God tells us to do is a false question. Practically every story in the Bible is an illustration of the fact that God tells people to do things and holds them responsible if they do not. This is not to deny all of the ramifications of myth and history, symbol and poetry of the Bible. But it is to state a simple fact. God held Adam and Eve responsible for eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Whatever depths of metaphorical or spiritual meaning there may be in the story, it .does strongly imply that they were responsible for their actions

Again, when God told Noah to build an ark, something far beyond the possibilities of most of us, He expected Noah to build it and held him responsible. When God told Abraham to go, He expected him to do it. This is one of the obvious, incontrovertible facts of the Bible: God commands. A human being either obeys or disobeys. The .human being either enjoys or suffers the consequences

The true question is not whether we can fulfill the commandments of God, but how we can fulfill them. This text in Deuteronomy gives us the first step in how `we may do all the words of this law'. With the single possible exception of the ten ,commandments

all revelation has come through a prophet. Everything that is revealed is there so that we can know what to do. We cannot obey God unless we know what He is telling us to .do. That is what the revelation of the prophets is for

There is a good deal of Bible evidence for this principle. The following are some of the more important references in the Bible which show that God uses prophets in order to .send His verbal revelation to humankind

Kings ١٧:١٣. `Yet the Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the ٢ prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my com... mandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your '.fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets

Chronicles ٢٠:٢٠. `And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the ٢ wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be '.established: believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper

Chronicles ٢٤:١٩. `Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the Lord; ٢ '.and they testified against them: but they would not give ear

Nehemiah ٩:٢۶. `Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets who testified against them to '.turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations

Jeremiah

Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this` .١ ,٧:٢٥ day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and '.sending them

Jeremiah ٢٩:١٩*. `Because they have not hearkened to my words, said the Lord, which I sent unto them by my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but '.ye would not hear, said the Lord

Jeremiah ٣٥:١٥*. `I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but ye have not inclined your '.ear, nor hearkened unto me

Daniel ٩:١٠. `Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his '.laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets

Hosea ١٢:١٠*. `I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and '.used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets

Amos ٣:٧. `Surely the Lord will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his '.servants the prophets

Zechariah ١:٤-٥*. `Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus said the Lord of hosts: Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from ,your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me

'.said the Lord

Zechariah ٧:١٢. `Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the '.former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of hosts

Matthew ٥:١٧. `Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not '.come to destroy, but to fulfill

Acts ٣:٢١-٢٣. `Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that '.prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people

James ٥:١٠. `Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.' This text is extremely important, since it almost uniquely in the Bible states clearly and overtly that the example of the prophets is normative. Bible religion is one which applies the example of the prophets to all the actions and institutions of life. It is the neglect of this .principle which has created an unjust and secular society

Peter ١:١٠. `Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and ١

'.searched diligently, who prophesized of the grace that should come unto you

The religion of the Bible is clearly a faith founded on the revelation of the prophets. The Bible also clearly states which prophets were true and which false. The message of the prophets is to focus attention on the commandments of God. Their purpose is to show what we should do in obedience to God. The prophet who ۱) upholds the commandments of God and ۲) is in agreement with the earlier prophets and ۳) comes .to call people to a return to obedience to God, is a true prophet

The example and messages of the prophets can only reach later generations as they wrote or dictated the revelation in written form. The belief in sacred books is a direct .and logical extension of belief in divine revelation through prophets

In the chain of revelation from God to angels to prophets there is continuity from prophets to the sacred Scriptures, the writings of the prophets which contain the words of revelation given to them. Such writings are referred to often in the Bible. .Some representative examples follow

Matthew ۲۲:۴۰. `On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.' The two commandments referred to here are the proclamation of the unity of God in Deuteronomy ۶:۴-۵ and the command in Leviticus ۱۹:۱۸ to treat the rights of the other person with the same regard as one's own. The revelation of God thus deals with human responsibility toward God, toward others, and

toward oneself. The law and the prophets in their entirety deal with these three .issues

Luke ۲۴:۴۴. `And he said unto them, These are the words which I speak unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.' At the time of Jesus three categories of sacred prophetic writings were already known: these are the law .of Moses or the Torah, the writings of the other prophets, and the Psalms

Timothy ۳:۱۶. `All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for ۲ doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.' The three categories of scripture mentioned in Luke ۲۴ are described here in terms of how they should be used. They can be used first of all to find out what they present as true .teaching or doctrine

This is basically the use that we have made of them here. We have tried first to find out their teaching about God, for example. But the writings can be used for reproof of wrong actions, for correction of our views, and for instruction in righteousness that is, learning what we should do and how to do it. An example of instruction in righteousness would be in our examination of the Bible texts to find out how the Bible .says people should pray

Peter ۱:۲۰-۲۱. Knowing this first that no prophecy of the scripture is of any ۲

private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' Here the apostle notes that what is written in the writings of the prophets is not merely their opinions. He says that what they have written is a revelation from God, inspired by the Spirit of .God

Revelation ۱:۳. `Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.' There is a threefold blessing on people's relationships to the writings of the prophets. There is a blessing on those who read or recite the words of their writings. There is a blessing on listening to the recitation of the sacred books. Finally there is a blessing on .doing what the sacred books tell people to do

Revelation of the will of God by the means of angels speaking to prophets who write or dictate the message is of little use unless God holds human beings responsible for how they relate to what He has revealed. This is a final point of common ground .between Judaism, Christianity and Islam

There is nothing more clear in the Bible than the fact that God brings all creatures into account. He brought Adam and Eve into account. He brought Cain into account for killing his brother. He brought the people of Noah's day into account, and those of Sodom

and Gomorrah. He brought the Israelites into account for worshipping other gods, for rejecting the prophets, and for neglecting the example of those sent to guide them. The unity of God, the prophets, and the divine guides are the three great criteria of .judgement

The Bible abounds in overt references to the Day of Judgement. `It is appointed unto .men once to die, but after this the judgement.' Hebrews ۹:۲۷

Deuteronomy ۳۲:۴۱*. `If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hands take hold on judgement; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate '.me

Psalm ۹:۷-۸. `But the Lord shall endure forever: he hath prepared his throne for judgement. And he shall judge the world in righteousness; he shall minister '.judgement to the people in uprightness

Ecclesiastes ۱۱:۹. `Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth: and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine '.eyes: but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgement

Ecclesiastes ۱۲:۱۳-۱۴. `Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.' This text points out two points in preparation for the Day of Judgement: ۱) to .acknowledge the one true God; ۲) and to keep His commandments

Matthew ۱۲:۳۶. `But

I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement.' No Bible prophet speaks so much of the Day of judgement as does Jesus Christ. This text is only one example of many.

Hebrews ۶:۲. `Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgement.' The author of this epistle points out that the Day of judgement is preceded by three points of readiness: ۱) ablutions, or means of purifying; ۲) laying on of hands, or swearing allegiance to the divinely appointed; and ۳) the resurrection from the dead. All three of these are acts of divine grace, the first through the prophets, the second through the divine guides, and the third directly at the hand of the angels.

۲ Peter ۲:۹. `The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgement to be punished.' Readiness for the Day of judgement depends on the grace of God which delivers the godly out of temptations. This grace has already been described in four points: the proclamation of the unity of God, the justice of God, God's gracious revelation through the holy prophets by the angels and preserved in the holy books, and the divine guides who exemplify the will of God in flesh and blood, in active demonstration.

۲ Peter ۳:۷. `But the heavens and the earth, which are now,

by the same word, are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men.' This text suggests that the Day of judgement is cataclysmic. It is not merely metaphorical of the condition of human responsibility. It entails a real end of the world as we know it and the beginning of another. It includes .real fire

Revelation ۱۴:۷. `Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgement is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, '.and the fountains of waters

With this verse we have a summary of what is called the everlasting gospel in verse six. It tells in one sentence what we have been discovering and uncovering up to this point. It includes first of all the acknowledgement of the one true God who made all things and is thus sovereign over all. It includes three things that we are to do in relationship to this God: ۱) we are to fear Him, that is, fear to act in any way contrary to His commandments; ۲) we are to give glory to Him, that is we are to live in such a way that we as creatures glorify our Creator; and ۳) we are to worship Him precisely in the way that we are commanded to do in the Bible. Finally, this text points to the final aspect of the gospel that we are to live in view of

.the Day of judgement which is imminently upon us

Although this final text is from the New Testament and thus not a part of the Jewish canon, the principles it expresses are common to all three Scriptural faiths. Human responsibility is an inherent principle throughout the Bible message, which comes to a .pinnacle in the Day of judgement when all are finally brought to account

Belief in angels, prophets, sacred books and the Day of judgement are fundamental to Islam. They are also beliefs which Muslims share in principle, if not in detail, with Jews and Christians. More importantly, from the point of view of this study, we have seen that all four beliefs are amply described in the Bible from a point of view which is .remarkably consistent with Islamic belief

We shall look at the first pillar of Islamic belief, the belief in God, with a little more .attention

God

Ali (۱۹۸۸:۷۶a-۷۹a) presents an Islamic concept of God. He expresses this in eight positive metaphysical attributes and eight negative ones. The positive attributes are Qadir, the Almighty;Aalim, the All-Knowing; Mudrik, the EverPerceiving; Hayy, the Ever-Living; Mureed, the All Independent in will and action;Mutakallim, the Creator of .Speech; and Sadiq, the Ever-Truthful

The negative attributes are Murakkab, compound; Makan, accommodation; Holool, incarnation; Maryee,visibility; Ehtiyaj, need; Shirkat, association; Mahaile hawadisor Tagha'iyyar, change; and Sifate-zaid, addition of qualities. The negative attributes cannot be attributed to God. The final negative attribute, addition of qualities, forbids conceiving of the positive attributes as separable from the essence

of God. Finally, according to All, God is a being consistent and not arbitrary, whose .essential attribute is justice

What is necessary to understand from a Christian point of view is that God in Islam is not conceived in terms of personhood or number, but as indefinably one. The doctrine .of the Trinity and the deity of Jesus are clearly rejected by Muslims

The very first words of the Bible are `In the beginning God'. The first and central issue of the Bible is God. The beliefs and practices involved with this issue are therefore fundamental. It is no use going on to establish other beliefs and practices before this issue is settled. Fortunately the Bible is clear and consistent on this matter. The most .important thing happens to be the thing expressed most clearly

It is also true that there are in existence beliefs and practices relating to God which did not exist at the time when the Bible writers were writing. It must not surprise us then that these matters are not dealt with in the Bible at all. Throughout much of the Bible the issue is whether one must worship the God of the Bible uniquely, or whether .it is permissible to worship other gods as well from time to time

The Bible clearly states that the God of the Bible must be worshipped uniquely. No others may be worshipped. One of the main ways this is brought out is by the affirma… tion that God is one, or that there

.is only one God, the God of the Bible

The text with the highest claim to authority in the Bible is the ten commandments. These are portrayed as being spoken by God Himself to a vast number of people, mostly descendants of Jacob, but including a vast internationally mixed multitude as well. The very first commandment is in Exodus ۲۰:۱-۳: `And God speak all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out '.of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me

The import of these words is radical. The sentence does not imply a hierarchy with the God of the Bible as the head of a pantheon of lesser deities below Him. We are con… fronted with only one speaker, the God who says `I' and `me'. His message is that He .will not accept any relations whatsoever between human beings and other gods

The second commandment in verses ۴-۶ shows what precisely is unacceptable and what is necessary. It is unacceptable to make an image of anything to bow down to or serve, because God is jealous, that is, He does not accept other gods before Him. .What is necessary is to love God and to obey His commandments

It has now been established on the basis of the most authoritative texts in the Bible that according to the Bible, people must acknowledge the one God of the Bible alone ,as God, avoid making any kind of image

mental or otherwise, of any deity to be bowed down to or served, but love God and do what He tells them to do. There are plenty of supporting texts for these first basic principles. Some of them are listed below. Those which claim to be the words of God .are marked with a star

Deuteronomy ۴:۳۵. `Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightiest know that the Lord he is God; there is none else beside him. This text, purported to be the words of Moses, clearly states four things: ۱) Something has been shown, that is, revealed. ۲) This revelation is not a matter of opinion or even of faith, but it is a matter of knowledge. To deny it is to be ignorant. ۳) The first point of this revelation is that the one referred to as YHWH (Lord) is God. ۴) The second point of this revelation is that .this one is the only God

Deuteronomy ۶:۴-۵. `Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.' Perhaps a better translation would be: The Lord is our judge, the Lord is one. Some commentators grasping at straws try to suggest that the word `one' in fact means a group of more than one. The word ahad in the original Hebrew of the text does in fact mean one entity. Just as the English word `one', it

only rarely refers to a unity of several entities, and when it does so it is immediately apparent from the context. The following text shows clearly that there is no room for .division in our love for God. It must be wholly directed to the one true God

Deuteronomy ۳۲:۳۹*. `See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me.' This text is an important one in the Torah or books of Moses, because it claims to be the very words of God Himself. He states clearly here that by the nature of reality and definition, not merely because of divine jealousy, there is not nor can there be any .associate with God. He alone is uniquely God Almighty

Nehemiah ۹:۶. 'Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preserve them all; and the host of heaven worshiped thee.' The word 'thou' in the archaic English is a singular. In contrast to the word `you', it can refer to one person only. It never refers to three persons. It is an accurate reflection of the original Hebrew text. The word `alone' shows clearly that only the one being of God is included. The final phrase shows clearly that the Bible concept is one of a universal God, not merely a tribal god of the Hebrews competing with many other tribal

.gods

Psalm ۱۸:۳۱. `For who is God save the Lord? or who is a rock save our God?' Here intensive affirmation is expressed in the Hebrew interrogative. The meaning is that no other being is God except the one person called YHWH or Lord in the text. The first part of the text defines who in fact is God. The second part says that only God is a rock. The Hebrew language abounds in double meanings based on metaphor. The rock expresses safe refuge. Only God is a secure refuge in trouble, the one to whom .we can turn in perfect confidence

Psalm ۸۶:۱۰. `For thou art great, and does wondrous things: thou art God alone.' The greatness of God and the wonderful character of His actions are taken here as evidence that He alone is God. This is an attempt to show that the unity of God is evident in the reality that we perceive and is the only logical conclusion to which we can come. This verse takes a different position from that seen earlier. No longer are we constrained to understand that the unity of God is revealed knowledge. Rather, here it is shown to be a product of reason, a logical deduction from the systematic .examination of observable phenomena

Isaiah ۴۳:۱۰*. Ye are my witnesses, said the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be

after me.' This text claims higher authority than the preceding ones, since it claims to be a quotation of the very words of God. It rejects the idea of form being applied to God. The unity of God implies the rejection of otherness (`other' implies a minimum of two). Rejection of otherness implies no standard of comparison. Form requires space in comparison, a perceptible edge. This is not applicable to God. God is not contained .in a form

The unity of God in this text is stated to have three cognitive bases: knowledge, belief, and understanding. This may refer first of all to revealed knowledge as already noted above. Understanding can be applied to the logical process described in Psalm ۸۶:۱۰. Finally a third basis is mentioned, that is, the basis of belief. These three bases may refer to the consecutive progression of cognition from revelation to belief in a given individual. On the other hand, it may refer to different coinciding aspects of cognition in a particular individual in such a way that they are all presently active at the same time. Finally, it is possible to understand them as referring to different types of .cognition in different individuals

Isaiah ۴۴:۶-۸*. `Thus said the Lord the King of Israel and his redeemer the Lord of Hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God... Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye

are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not '.any

This is another text claiming divine authority. The introductory expressions are in apposition, that is, they refer to one and the same personage who is stated to be ۱) the Lord (YHWH), ۲) the King of Israel, ۳) the redeemer of Israel, and ۴) the Lord of Hosts. This is not a reference to more than one individual. This is not only evident from the expressions themselves, but from what follows, where the first person singular 'I' is used. This accumulation of statements that God is one is supported with divine humor. It may be that human beings are so wise that they know any number of Gods. .But the true God of heaven and earth knows only one

Isaiah ۴۵:۵,۲۱-۲۲*. `I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I guided thee, though thou hast not known me... Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the Lord? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Savior; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.' This final text of Isaiah also claims divine authority. Here the affirmation of the unity of

God is evidence of ۱) His eternity, ۲) His omniscience, ۳) His justice, and ۴) His saving .action

It may not be immediately apparent how each of these attributes can be deduced from the unity of God. But first of all, the unity of God implies eternity If there is time which God does not control, such time in itself implies an Other which is not God. But this is logically and textually inadmissible. Therefore, the unity of God implies His .eternity

In the same way, an area of knowledge outside the control of God implies a Knower and known outside the frame of reference of God, an Other. Therefore, the unity of .God implies omniscience

Perfect, impartial justice must have as a bare minimum access to all knowledge pertaining to a case of dispute. Such knowledge is available with certainty only to an .omniscient God. The unity of God therefore implies perfect justice

The action of salvation is logically deduced from the attribute of justice. But to call God a Savior implies action within time and space. It does not thereby imply limitation in time and space, and as such does not therefore imply that God is incarnate or takes .on form

To this point we have examined texts from the so-called Old Testament. Although Christians often refer to the Old Testament in evidence for their own belief, when they are confronted with Old Testament texts which conflict with their doctrines, they often point out that the Old Testament is done away with, nailed

to the cross, and superseded by the Gospel. What does the Gospel say about the unity ?of God

Matthew ۱۹:۱۷. `And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.' Jesus here rejects the implication that he is God. His argument is that absolute goodness .belongs only to God. In rejecting this attribute in the absolute sense, he rejects deity

Mark ۱۰:۱۸. `And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good '.but one, that is, God

Mark ۱۲:۲۹. `The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord.' Jesus affirms the unity of God in one being, and calls this the most important fundamental of faith, the first commandment. We are therefore justified in assuming that this point is the first and most essential message in the Gospel of Christ. The questioner did not lead Jesus on to refer to this text. He gave him complete liberty to choose what he considered to be the first and most important issue. That Christ chose this text is a devastating argument. The importance of this truth was not lost on his questioner: Mark ۱۲:۳۲, `Well, Master, thou hast said the truth; for there is '.one God; and there is none other but he

Strangely enough, many Christians actually consider the Pauline epistles of more normative authority than the Gospels themselves. The unity of God is

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hardly a doctrine which can change from one revelation to another. If the early writings uphold it, the latter ones must uphold it too, or else discredit themselves. .However, the Apostle Paul is a champion of the unity of God as well

'.Corinthians ۸:۶. `But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things ۱

'.Galatians ۳:۲۰. `God is one

Ephesians ۴:۴-۶. `There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is '.above all, and through all, and in you all

Timothy ۲:۵, `There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man ۱ '.Christ Jesus

From these texts we see that Paul, as must be expected with his Biblical faith, recognizes the absolute unity of God. His expressions leave no room for a trinity. Although the New Testament speaks of Jesus in terms which Christians take as proof of his divinity, yet in every case these are attributes that are given to him by God. Whatever these attributes may be, no matter how great, it remains that Jesus is in every case a recipient. But God is not a recipient. The Apostle Paul tells us clearly what Jesus is: a man. According to the Christian Scriptures he is certainly a great and glorious man, a man sent from God, a sinless man, a man ascended to the right hand of God, a man even

given all authority in heaven and in earth, and a man to whom all owe absolute loyalty .and devotion. But he remains forever a man and not God

Paul tells us in ١ Timothy ٢:٥ that there is but one God, and that the mediator at that time between God and humankind was Jesus Christ, who was a man. This Jesus Christ is therefore a different entity in this sentence than the one God to whom Paul also refers. In addition, we know from Numbers ٢٣:١٩ that God is not a man. The syllogism .is clear: ١) God is not a man. ٢) Jesus is a man. ٣) Therefore, Jesus is not God

Some commentators suggest that James and Paul are at odds on basic issues. Be that as it may, they are agreed on the unity of God. James ٢:١٩ says, 'Thou believes that '.there is one God; thou does well

In sum, a large segment of the Bible serves to confirm the truth that God is one, .unique, incomparable and without associate

A Just God

Logically speaking, to say that God is one is to say that God is impartial. That is, when we speak of God we must ignore parts. There are no parts involved in the issue. There are not two sides of the story. That is why all of the things the Bible has to say about .(God can be deduced from the one Bible statement, a just God (Isaiah ٤٥:٢١

Nehemiah ٩:٣٣. 'Howbeit thou art just in all that is

brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly.' In this prayer Nehemiah recognizes the justice of God even during difficult times. There is a tendency among some to suggest that God is the source of evil and good alike. The principle of justice denies that. Although it is possible to illuminate this principle philo… sophically, to do so would go beyond the Biblical text. The Bible answer to the question .'is that, insofar as God is concerned, `we cannot find him out

Job ۳۷:۲۳. `Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgement, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict.' Here is perhaps the most complete expression of the justice of God in the Bible. Justice is placed in the context of God's power and judgement. These two working together may be perceived from a human point of view as affliction. We are warned that this perception is false, and we should beware of laying any particular thing to God's account, lest we set ourselves .up in judgement of God

Psalm ۸۹:۱۴. `Justice and judgement are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.' Again judgement and sovereignty are associated with justice. This verse indicates, however, that mercy and truth are also essential to the .configuration of justice as applied to human affairs

It has become apparent that some things can be said about God since they are inherent to the logic of God's unity

and justice. The attributes of power, judgement, mercy and truth have already appeared. The Bible refers to other things that can truthfully be said about God, espe... .cially from the human point of view

Numbers ۲۲:۲۸. `And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?' It is peculiar that Christian interpreters ignore a fundamental attribute of God, which is .creation of speech

Deuteronomy ۳۲:۴. `He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgement: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.' `Rock' is the concrete term referring to God as the perfect refuge. This is based in this text on the fact that his work is perfect, that is, complete in itself and not dependent on anything. This is stated to be possible because all his ways are judgement, that is, everything He does is based on His own judgement and is not contingent on anything else. There is therefore nothing that can weaken His capacity to be a refuge. The result of such independence is that God is perfectly true, since there is neither need nor contingent .that can pressure Him to swerve from His perfect judgement

Deuteronomy ۳۳:۲۷. `The eternal God is thy refuge.' Eternity does not refer to infinite time, but the fact that God is not bound by time and space at all. According to the creation story in Genesis ۱, God

created space and time. God's sovereignty over space and time permit Him to be the perfect refuge from all dangers that exist in time and space. ۱ Chronicles ۲۹:۱۱-۱۲. 'Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to '.make great, and to give strength unto all

Job ۳۶:۲۶. `Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his '.years be searched out

Psalm ۹۰:۲. `Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.' Not only is God eternal, but He is uniquely eternal. He is the only One who is not bound by time and space. Not only did He create all things, but He is God independently of all things. He does not need anything to establish His divinity by comparison. He is good without the evil which defines good relatively, He is Creator even without creation to prove His .creatorship, He is without any `is not' to support His existence

Psalm ۹۳:۲. 'Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting.' Eternity .logically gives rise to sovereignty

.Note Deuteronomy ۳۳:۲۷

Isaiah ۴۰:۲۸. `Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.' The logical succession here is eternity, sovereignty, creatorship, omnipotence, and omniscience. Eternity or being unbounded by time and space suggests sovereignty. Sovereignty suggests the capacity to create. Creating .suggests complete power over what is created and perfect knowledge of it

Isaiah ۵۷:۱۵*. `Thus said the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' The exaltedness of God is referred before eternity, thus showing that it is not a relative but an absolute exaltedness. God is not to be compared to another. On the other side of eternity comes the attribute of holiness. Holiness, that is, separation or otherness, cannot be considered relative either, since the absoluteness of God's attributes is already established in the beginning of the verse. The last half of the verse expresses the divine penetration into the human world. The complete separateness of God might suggest that the human world can have no contact with divinity. This logical conclusion must be denied, however, since it would limit God. As exalted sovereign, eternal and holy or separate, God can choose to deal with

the human world. He is not limited by it. God's penetration into the created world is always divine, that is sovereign and independent. Therefore, such penetration does not imply the possibility of incarnation, which by definition is subservient and .dependent, subject to the limitations of time and space

Jeremiah ۱۰:۶. `Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Lord; thou art great, and thy name is great in might.' The term `great' is used here in the absolute sense. The text states that there is none to be compared with God. No standard of measurement .can be applied to God. There is therefore no associate or compound with God

Jeremiah ۱۰:۱۰. `But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king.' To be truly God implies that such God is living and always sovereign. As such, the .idea that death can be attached to God is inconsistent and therefore invalid

'?Habakkuk ۱:۱۲. `Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One

Luke ۱۹:۴۰. `And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.' Here Jesus recognizes the .attribute of God which is creation of speech

'.Romans ۱۶:۲۶. `The everlasting God

Timothy ۱:۱۷. `Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be ۱ honor and glory for ever and ever.' Within one sentence Paul states the attributes of .sovereignty, eternity, immortality, invisibility, and omniscience

James ۱:۱۷. `Every good gift and every perfect

gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' This text states that God is unchanging. It implies at the same time that there is no compound or association with God, nor any .qualities additional

These texts are only representative of hundreds more in the Bible expressing the inherent divine attributes. We can affirm these attributes without breaking the commandment 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image' because they are overtly expressed in the Bible itself. On the basis of these texts we can say that God is eternal, almighty, all-knowing, ever-perceiving, ever-living, all-independent in will and action, creator of speech, and ever-truthful. We can affirm that God is never a compound, accommodation, incarnation, association, nor is He visible or changing, nor does He have need or qualities that may be separated, added or subtracted. But all of these things are logically deducible from His unity and justice. At this point I have reached what is sufficient in expressing the Bible faith in regard to what God is like. I .conclude in brief, that a large segment of the Bible is there to show that God is just

We can summarize the everlasting Gospel to this point: ١) God is One and there is no other God but He. ٢) The one true God is inherently just, and all of his actions and .attributes are consistent with His perfect justice

We have noted that the Bible declares God to

be just. The problem of justice is more complex than that, however. The metaphysical dilemma is how to reconcile the absolute sovereignty of God with the clear fact that the God of Scripture and revelation firmly calls human beings to account for their .behavior

If God is truly sovereign, does that not mean that all things are determined by His will? If all things are determined by God's will, how then can God hold people accountable for what they do? There are texts in both the Bible and Qur'an which seem to affirm either God's absolute sovereignty or determinism on one hand, and human accountability and free will on the other. If it has become apparent that a proof text method is not sufficient for resolving the issue of God's unity or trinity, it is even more apparent that a simple proof text method will tell us even less about this knotty .problem

The debate between Pelagius and Augustine, and between predestination and Arminianism, in Christianity, seems to have parallels in Islamic history as well. Sunni theology tends to opt for sovereignty. There is an attitude of awe before the decree of God which seems, from the human viewpoint, only to gain from its arbitrary character. By contrast, Shiite theology tends to reconcile sovereignty and free will in a middle ground. In brief, actual events are conceived to consist of various aspects, all of which are created by a sovereign God. The whole configuration is within the sovereignty of God, but

.one of the many contributing factors in any event may be free will

The middle way between determinism and free will is not merely a means of reconciling texts which seem to conflict. It is a real attempt to deal with the metaphysical issues involved in both human suffering and human responsibility. Nevertheless, I have chosen one text to illustrate the problem. In ٢ Samuel ٢٤:١ we have a text which has been used by Ahmed Deedat to illustrate the corruption of the .Bible, which is the conclusion he draws from the conflict with ١ Chronicles ٢١:١

And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David` '.against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah

Samuel ٢٤:١. `And Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number ١ .Israel.' ١ Chronicles ٢١:١

The conflict between the two texts is in the matter of who moved David to number Israel, the Lord or Satan. The facile Christian solution appears inadequate. It would have the `he' of ١ Samuel ٢٤:١ refer not to the natural antecedent (the Lord), but an unmentioned antecedent (Satan). The most natural solution is to accept that one text .states the Lord to have moved David and the other Satan

An explanation following the midway between determinism and free will would be as follows. This event includes many contributing aspects, among which are divine sovereignty, the action of Satan, and the exercise of will or choice on the part of David. It is the configuration of

these aspects, along with other contributing factors, which produced the event. One aspect, divine sovereignty, is mentioned in ١ Samuel ٢۴:١. Another aspect, Satanic temptation, is mentioned in ١ Chronicles ٢١:١. Both versions note the responsibility of .David

Since all three aspects are present in the text, the best interpretation is one which includes all of them. Ahmed Deedat's suggestion that the conflict between sovereignty and Satanic action in the Bible implies a corrupt text is not only weak from a scholarly point of view, but could be turned back against the Qur'an itself, God .forbid

In conclusion, we may say that the Bible definitely states that God is just. How the Justice of God fits into the working of divine sovereignty and human free will is a subject requiring metaphysical speculation. The middle way, however, between determinism and free will provides a method for reconciling the seeming conflicts in .both the Bible and the holy Qur'an

?Son of God or God the Son

Despite the view of many Christians to the contrary, one need only refer to a host of Christian writers through the centuries to show that reasonable interpreters of the .Bible have consistently upheld the doctrine of the unity of God throughout history

A good example is Edward Elwall, prominent eighteenth-century Baptist merchant and writer of religious literature. In ١٧٢۶ he wrote in his tract Dagon fallen upon his stumps, `Is it not as gross an Absurdity to say, the One God of Heaven and Earth, is Three or Four Persons, as to say, the

One King of Great Britain and Ireland, is Three or Four Persons? Is not the former '?altogether as false as the latter

According to Elwall the Bible position is simple and straightforward. God is One (Exodus ۲۰:۳). Jesus Christ is our Lord and Master, the Messiah and reigning and soon-coming King of the promised Fifth Monarchy of Daniel chapter two; our Savior, who was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, worked great miracles and wonders by the permission and power of God, and was snatched up from the death of the cross and .the grave to ascend to the right hand of God. But he is not God

Elwall recognizes the authority of the ten commandments. These are the words revealed without intermediary to the multitude of humankind. These are above all the words of God Himself. To maintain that Jesus is God the Son is to break the first commandment, that is, Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Therefore Edward .Elwall begins his tract with these words: 'Thou shalt have no other Gods but Me

This Sacred Commandment was spoke by God himself, and not only so, but it was wrote by the Finger of God, therefore all those that Love him with all their Heart, and Soul, and Strength, ought to believe and obey this Law. Now let all Men that fear God, take particular Notice, that the very last word of this glorious Law, viz. (Me) is a certain Confutation of those who make

'.the most high God to be a plurality of Persons

If Jesus Christ is not God, is not deity, then what is he? The Christian Scriptures are clear on the matter. `There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.' ١ Timothy ٢:۵. This text clearly contradicts the established Christian view that the mediator between God and man must be both man and deity. The logic of that thought notwithstanding, the Scripture states him to be clearly and .unequivocally man and not God

The position does not belittle Christ by saying that he is man and not God. It may be that he is a man so far above the men we know today that to human senses he would even appear to be like God. Nevertheless we must remember that human senses are not the criteria we are dealing with, but the Christian Scriptures. That Scripture states God to be one, and we have not the right to associate or confuse anyone, even one so great as Jesus Christ, with God Almighty. To do so is to fall into polytheism and, from .an Islamic viewpoint, vastly to belittle and lower the concept of God

What does the Bible mean then, when it says that Jesus is the son of God? In most modern languages it is rare to use the words father and son in other but literal meanings of biological descent. That is why readers of the Bible in translation may be .honestly mistaken

The word `son' as applied to Christ and the word `father' as applied to God must be understood as metaphorical, that is, in a meaning other than the literally biological .one

Indeed, few people actually understand them literally. No one, insofar as I know, actually believes that God had sexual intercourse with Mary to produce Jesus. Such an idea is revolting to most minds and is certainly not held by any of the established Christian creeds. God, even according to Christian belief, is not the father of Christ or .any other humans in any literal sense

The word `son' is clearly used in the Bible to express the character of people, and not always their biological descent. The word is used in both ways in ۱ Samuel ۲:۱۲. `Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord.' It cannot mean that these young men had two biological fathers. The genes of only one sperm can naturally combine with the ovum to produce a genetically new individual. The margin of my Bible explains that the expression `sons of Belial' means `wicked men', that is `sons .of wickedness'. A `son of God' is just the opposite

What are the non-biological usages of the word father in the Bible? In Genesis ۴:۲۰-۲۱ `father of such as dwell in tents' and `father of all such as handle the harp', suggest a meaning of `inventor, first, prototype'. The words father and sons are used in Genesis ۱۰:۲۱ in the sense of ancestor

and descendants. Joseph was no doubt younger than Pharaoh, but still he became .Pharaoh's father or counselor in Genesis ۴۵:۸

The word father is used by a subject in addressing a king in ۱ Samuel ۲۴:۱۱. Elisha, while the subordinate of Elijah the prophet, addresses him as father in ۲ Kings ۲:۱۲. Again in terms of a servant to master, or in this case a soldier to a general, the accompanying soldier addresses Naaman as father in ۲ Kings ۵:۱۳. Five distinct groups of meaning appear: ۱) a literal biological father, ۲) an ancestor, ۳) an inventor or prototype, ۴) someone who gives counsel or information, and ۵) someone to whom .absolute obedience is due

Considering that Jesus says that he came to do nothing but his Father's will, the last definition of father is probably the most appropriate as applied to his relationship with God. Jesus is called the Son of God because he perfectly carries out the will of God. It was Christian failure to understand this true meaning that made it necessary, for example, to use another metaphor in the Qur'an for Jesus: servant of God. Neither metaphor completely describes the uniqueness of Christ the Messiah in the Scriptural .belief system. They are only two expressions among many

All such expressions as father and son, master and servant, are merely metaphorical and cannot perfectly describe anyone's relationship to God, whose being and essence are completely outside the realm of human expression and language. To say that a person is

a child of God or a servant of God is only to point out the relationship as a recipient of divine grace and the responsibility of obedience. God is not anyone's literal father or slave master. Those are human relations that merely approximate or give a direction in understanding. The Bible uses other terms as well, such as `husband', for God, and metaphorically `unfaithfulness' for sin. All such expressions are only useful to the extent that they inspire one to submit to God's will. They are not intended to give .information about the nature of God, His essence, being or attributes

It appears that the expression Son of God is also used, similarly to the expression Son of Man, to intimate that Jesus is the promised Messiah. That can be inferred from Daniel ۳:۲۴, if this text has a messianic implication. Let it be noted that Jesus himself did not like to use the term at all. He preferred other expressions of his Messiah ship, .most especially the expression Son of Man

Unitarian Answers to Trinitarian claims

Trinitarian claim: `The New Testament clearly presents Christ as God. The names applied to Christ in the New Testament are such that they could properly be applied only to one who was God. For example, Jesus is called God in the phrase, "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus" (Titus ۲:۱۳; compare John ۱:۱; Hebrews ۱:۸; Romans ۹:۵; ۱ John ۵:۲۰-۲۱).' Josh McDowell, More Than a

.Carpenter, Living Books, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, ۱۹۷۳, page ۱۱

Unitarian Answer: The New Testament does not clearly present Christ as God. The names applied to Christ in the New Testament could properly be applied to one who represents God and has received `all authority in heaven and earth' from Him. .McDowell claims that the following texts clearly call Christ God

Titus ۲:۱۳. `Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great .۱ God and our Savior Jesus Christ.' McDowell assumes that the expressions `great God' and `Savior' are in apposition, that is, that they both refer to one and the same individual. The English translation is ambiguous. The fact is that the `of' in English, which translates the Greek genitive is repeated in the Greek with the words `Savior, Christ Jesus' so that a more literal translation would be: `the glorious appearing of our great God and of our Savior, Jesus Christ'. There is no reason to assume that these .are one and the same being. The text does not `clearly' present Christ as God

John ۱:۱. `In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the .۲ Word was God.' Our task is not to explain what this text actually means, but to demonstrate that it does not clearly present Jesus as God. The first point is that there is a difficulty in conceiving that the Word is with God on the one hand, and is God on .the other

The first clause states

that there is a distinction between the Word and God (since the one is with the other), while the second states that they are one and the same. As it stands the sentence does not make sense. It does make sense, however, if we realize that the word theos in Greek used here is an equivalent of the Hebrew word Elohim. Now Elohim can mean God, gods, a god, judge, exalted one, and even angel. The first word refers to God, .while the second to another entity

The reference to another entity clearly shows the Word not to be the God with whom the Word is. Indeed some scholars point out that a better translation would be: `and the Word was a god'. This also appears to me to be somewhat forced. One of the .other alternatives should probably be chosen

The Christian claim depends on John ۱:۱۴, `The Word became flesh.' If this is taken to mean that the Almighty God became flesh, or became incarnate as a human being, this would entail a change in the essence of God, which is both logically and .Scripturally unacceptable. Note that this text does not say that Jesus is God

It is an interesting fact that the Qur'an calls Jesus the Word of God without any of its adherents suggesting that the expression `clearly' presents him as God. Surely referring to Jesus as the Word of God is coherent with Islamic belief and terminology, .and does not imply deity

Hebrews ۱:۸. `But unto .۳

the Son he said, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.' This is one of a series of quotations from the Old Testament. The first, Psalm ۲:۷ (Hebrews ۱:۵a), was originally spoken to David. The second, ۲ Samuel ۷:۱۴ (Hebrews ۱:۵b), was also spoken to David about his `seed', .primarily Solomon, but no doubt also secondarily and prophetically about the Messiah

The third quotation (Hebrews ۱:۶) is from a non-Biblical Jewish tradition which also appears in the Qur'an: `And let all the angels of God worship him.' The personage primarily referred to in the original tradition is Adam, to whom the angels are commanded to prostrate. The word `worship' in Hebrews refers to prostration before a high personage such as a king. Then comes Psalm ۴۵:۶-۷ the text quoted by McDowell from Hebrews ۱:۸. This text was originally part of the king's wedding invocation. The word Elohim, translated `God', is applied to the king. As such, it should probably best be translated as judge' or `exalted one'. This is especially apparent from the fact that the true God Almighty is referred to in Psalm ۴۵:۷ as a different .entity

McDowell does not refer to Hebrews ۱:۱۰, which is in fact the only verse used to prove the trinity demanding careful investigation. The quotation is from Psalm ۱۰۲:۲۵۲۷. It is .the only one of the original quotations which was originally directed to God Himself

Let it first be noted that the

quotation is not directed to Jesus in Hebrews, but is a continuation of the expression in Hebrews ۱:۸ pros or `in reference to' Jesus. This is in contrast to sentences spoken `to' someone, as in Hebrews ۱:۵. These phrases are not therefore spoken `to' Jesus, .but are `in reference' to him

The second point is that the context clearly has as its purpose to exalt Jesus Christ above even the angels. All of the quotations serve that purpose. They refer to aspects or events in the life of Jesus which show him to be in some way superior to the angels. Psalm ۱۰۲ is the last of a series of martyrdom Psalms. The clear inference in this chapter is that after all of the glorious aspects and events in Jesus' life that show him to be superior to the angels, there is finally his martyrdom. This too shows his superiority and leads into the subject of the second chapter of Hebrews which is in .fact that self-sacrifice

To those of us not accustomed to the liturgical use of the Psalms, this explanation is not immediately clear. But to the Hebrews to whom these words were written, nothing could be more natural. The whole panorama of the martyrdom liturgy immediately floods into the Hebrew mind when these words are encountered. No .better introduction to chapter two could have been invented

It is not stated that Jesus is God. Superiority to the angels does not necessarily imply that Jesus is God Almighty. The chapter deals

in every possible superlative, but does not state Jesus to be God. Even verse three makes a clear distinction between the being which is Jesus and the being which is .'God, referred to here as `Majesty on high

Romans ۹:۵. `Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ .۴ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.' The implication of McDowell is again that the word `God' is in opposition to the word `Christ'. The original Greek has no punctuation. The word `amen' at the end makes the sentence more .understandable as a formal benediction

In that case, it is perfectly possible to understand the divine blessing attached to the end without in the least implying that this God and the earlier Christ are one and the same being. It is not even absolutely clear whether the phrase `who is over all' should refer to Christ, which precedes it, or to God, which comes after it. There is no theological reason why it could not refer to Christ. If God has set Christ `over all', that in itself shows that Christ, being the recipient of divine favor, is not God himself (see .(Philippians ۲:۹-۱۱

John ۵:۲۰. `And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us ۱ . ۵ understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.' McDowell assumes that

the word `this' refers to Christ as its antecedent, thus making Christ the true God. However, we must choose between the two possible antecedents given in the first part of the verse: God and Christ. Obviously God is equal to God. This text does not clearly present Christ as God. It infinitely more clearly presents God as God and Christ .as Christ

Trinitarian claim: `The Scriptures attribute characteristics to him that can be true only of God. Jesus is presented as being self-existent (John ۱:۴; ۱۴:۶); omnipresent (Matthew ۲۸:۲۰; ۱۸:۲۰); omniscient (John ۴:۱۶; ۶:۶۴; Matthew ۱۷:۲۲-۲۷); omnipotent (Revelation ۱:۸; Luke ۴:۳۹-۵۵; ۷:۱۴, ۱۵; Matthew ۸:۲۶, ۲۷); and possessing eternal life (۱ .John ۵:۱۱, ۱۲, ۲۰; John ۱:۴).' McDowell ۱۹۷۳, ۱۱

Unitarian Answer: It is true that these characteristics absolutely belong to God alone. But God can and does impart divine graces to human beings sent to represent Him. The language of the texts referred to by McDowell indicates that Jesus received these characteristics from God. As a recipient he cannot be God himself for two reasons: ۱) It is illogical to think that the giver and the recipient are both God; ۲) to become a recipient implies need or dependence on the giver, which characteristic cannot be .applied to God

The attributes of Jesus in the New Testament do not differ from the attributes claimed for the twelve holy Imams by Ali (۱۹۸۸:۸۳a-۹۶a) and Tabataba'i (۱۲۳ff.). Yet in that belief system there is no inference whatsoever that these beings are God .Himself

Orientalists suggest that the early Christian concept of Christ is the origin of the Islamic concept of the Imamate. Therefore, such attributes can be true without .necessarily indicating that Jesus is one and the same person as God Almighty

John ۱:۴. `In him was life; and the life was the light of men.' At this point the gospel is still referring to the Word before the supposed incarnation. It cannot therefore be taken as a direct reference to the person of Jesus. The verse does not state that .Jesus possessed life in himself without the intervention of God. No Bible text does

John ۱۴:۶. `I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.' Jesus here claims a monopoly on access to God. This does not suggest that his .life is independent of God

Matthew ۲۸:۲۰. `I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' This is not in fact a claim of omnipresence. It is a claim of immediate and direct access for believers. The claim is no different than that for the Shiite Imam in occultation, and may not be very different than the Jewish claim for Elijah and the Muslim claim for .Enoch (Khidr). There is no implication of deity

Matthew ۱۸:۲۰. `For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' This is not omnipresence either. It is in fact even more limited than Matthew ۲۸:۲۰, since there are more

conditions: the presence of at least two believers, the purpose of gathering (for worship?), and the invocation of the name of Jesus. There is no implication of deity.

John ۴:۱۶ and ۶:۶۴ describe knowledge of people's lives and events past and future which would not normally belong to a human being. Such knowledge would, however, normally be granted to a prophet. If Jesus is given the attributes of a prophet, it does not mean that he is therefore God any more than any of the other prophets with such knowledge is God. Matthew ۱۷:۲۲-۲۷ is also a prophecy of future events. It is not a claim to omniscience. Jesus in fact denies omniscience: `But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.' Matthew ۲۴:۳۶.

Revelation ۱:۸. `I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, said the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.' This verse is supposed to attribute omnipotence to Jesus because of the reference to the word `almighty'. However, the speaker is not identified as Jesus.

It is assumed to be Jesus because it is inferred that Jesus was the origin of the voice speaking the same words in Revelation ۱:۱۱. But these words are a quotation from Isaiah ۴۱:۴, where they are spoken by God Himself. Revelation ۱:۸ says these words are spoken by the Lord. The word kyrios in the original Greek sometimes refers to God, sometimes to Christ, and sometimes

as a form of polite address to other human beings. At this point it is safe to assume on .the basis of the context that the speaker is God Almighty and not Jesus Christ

Luke ۴:۳۹-۵۵. In this story Jesus has power to heal and authority over devils, who bear witness that he is `the Christ, the Son of God'. Such power, delegated by God, does .not imply omnipotence. It only implies God-given authority

Luke ۷:۱۴-۱۵. This story shows that Jesus had the power to raise the dead to life. He is not the only prophet mentioned in the Bible with such power from God. Such power .does not imply omnipotence. It only implies God-given authority

Matthew ۸:۲۶-۲۷. This story of power to still the storm, impressive as it is, does not imply that this was anything but power delegated to Jesus from God. There is no intimation of omnipotence. For God to give a man such power is not to make that man .into God Himself

John ۵:۱۱-۱۲, ۲۰. This text speaks of no life whatsoever which is not given by God. Life ۱ that is given by God, although it be in Christ, does not imply that Jesus possesses .eternal life in such a way to make him God. The text does not state or imply this

Trinitarian claim: `Jesus received worship as God (Matthew ۱۴:۳۳; ۲۸:۹) and sometimes even demanded to be worshipped as God (John ۵:۲۳; compare Hebrews ۱:۶; .Revelation ۵:۸-۱۴).' McDowell ۱۹۷۳, ۱۲

Unitarian Answer: The worship of gods in Greek

is generally expressed by other words than the one translated `worship' in the New Testament. The Greek word translated `worship' in the New Testament seems to emphasize the bodily position of prostration involved in worship. As such it differs from the general usage of the Greek word, which implies giving honor by kissing or .bowing to kiss the hand or even foot

This kind of worship in Greek generally was not for God or gods, but for people in high position from whom petitions are made. The worship of gods in Greek is generally expressed by other words. Most of the texts in the New Testament either refer clearly to worship of God or are somewhat ambiguous acts of homage. Some texts show clearly that the word does not imply divinity. Such an example is in Matthew ۹:۱۸. `While he speaks these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead...' This abject homage of the .ruler was certainly not the worship of Jesus as God

Dictionaries of New Testament Greek made even by Trinitarian scholars recognize this variety in the usage of the word. Even Matthew ۲:۲,۸,۱۱; ۲۰:۲۰; Luke ۴:۷; ۲۴:۵۲ are considered by Harper and Row's Analytical Greek Lexicon to be examples of the word in which it does not imply divinity. The line between the two meanings will therefore often be determined by the faith of the reader, and as such cannot be construed as proof of

.the deity of Jesus

Trinitarian claim: Paul `acknowledged the Lamb of God (Jesus) as God when he said, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts ۲۰:۲۸).' McDowell ۱۹۷۳, ۱۲.

Unitarian Answer: The original Greek does not say `with His own blood'. It says quite literally, `with the blood of His own'. The verse does not say outright who `His own' is, but we can safely assume that Christ is meant. To equate Christ with God in this verse is to jump again to unwarranted conclusions.

Trinitarian claim: `Peter confessed, after Christ asked him who he was: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew ۱۶:۱۶).' McDowell ۱۹۷۳, ۱۲. The same point is made on the following page with John ۱۱:۲۷ and John ۱:۴۹, where the phrase `Son of God' is used.

Unitarian Answer: The expression `Son of God' does not imply divinity for Jesus any more than for anyone else given `power to become the children of God'. If Jesus is the son of God, that definitely shows him not to be God Himself. One cannot be both one's father and oneself at the same time. If Jesus is the son of God, then he certainly is not God.

Christians use the argument of species as opposed to personage in order to show that since the Father is of the species `God', so is the

Son. The fallacy of this is that the Bible does not present the species of God, but the one personage of God. The word `son' is used in the Bible to mean much more than the biological offspring. The species argument assumes that Jesus is the biological .offspring of God. But in fact this is not the Christian teaching

The Christian teaching itself, whatever it may in fact be, is not literal. No Christian believes that Jesus is the literal, biological son of God. The traditional Christian teaching is that Jesus' mother was a virgin. If God were the biological father of Jesus, Mary could not have been a virgin. So one of the metaphorical meanings of the word .must be chosen

A good example is in ۱ Samuel ۲:۱۲: `Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord.' Here the word `son' is used first literally, and then metaphorically. The margin says that a son of Belial is a wicked man. The verse itself goes on to explain that they `knew not the Lord'. Now Jesus, the `Son' of God, by the same token is precisely the opposite, that is, a righteous man, one who did know the Lord. Surely the Bible means more than this by the expression. It has to do with being the promised Messiah. But being the promised Messiah does not imply that Jesus is God. It implies .only that he is the Christ

On the other hand, it must be remembered

that the phrase `Son of God' in the Bible is not limited to Jesus. See for example .Genesis ۶:۲ and job ۱:۶. It cannot in itself imply deity

Trinitarian claim: `While Stephen was being stoned, he called upon the Lord and said, ."Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" (Acts ۷:۵۹).' McDowell ۱۹۷۳, ۱۳

Unitarian Answer: The Trinitarian claim may be based here on the usage of the word Lord. Although the word Lord is often applied to God in the Bible, it is not limited to that use by any means. It is applied to Jesus in the sense of `sir' or `master' as well as to any number of people in courteous address. It is clear that the word Lord here refers .to Jesus, but the word does not imply divinity

The claim may depend, however, on Stephen's act of calling upon Jesus in this situation as an indication of his divinity. The author does not clarify what in fact here is supposed to prove that Jesus is God. Considering the fact that Stephen believed Jesus to have been crucified, resurrected and ascended into heaven, it is quite understandable that he should hope that Jesus would receive his spirit. That hope does not imply divinity, however. It only recognizes the resurrection and ascension. Although, for example, most Muslims deny the crucifixion, all Muslims believe in the ascension and second return of Jesus without believing in his divinity. Exceptional .events or powers do not automatically imply divinity

Trinitarian claim: `John the Baptist announced the coming

of Jesus by saying that "the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, 'Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well... .pleased"' (Luke ٣:٢٢).' McDowell ١٩٧٣, ١٣

Unitarian Answer: Apparently the author assumes that to be the Son of God in the case of Jesus implies divinity. He does not assume it in other instances, which is .inconsistent. Either all Sons of God are thereby divine, or they are not

Trinitarian claim: "`Thomas answered and said to Him, `My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, `Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed"' (John ٢٠:٢٦-٢٩). Jesus accepted Thomas's .acknowledgement of him as God.' McDowell ١٩٧٣, ١۴

Unitarian Answer: This claim, like so many before it, is really based on a misunderstanding of the Bible because the claimant is referring to a translation. Much trouble could be avoided if Christians, like Jews and Muslims, printed their sacred books with the original language included. The adherents of those faiths become aware in that way at least of the fact that what they are reading in English is not .authoritative. It is only a very fallible translation

Now the Greek text of the phrase `My Lord and my God!' uses the nominative form of both `Lord' and `God'. Since both of these are from the second declension singular, ,there is in Greek a vocative which is clearly different in form. Thus

if the words refer to the person addressed, they should be in the vocative. If the words refer to someone other than the person to whom they are spoken, they should .be in the nominative case. Now in fact they are in the nominative, not the vocative

This suggests that they refer to some other personage than to the one to whom they are addressed. They are addressed to Jesus. So we may know that Jesus at least is not the `Lord' and `God' to whom Thomas refers. If the person to whom you exclaim `Oh, my Lord!' thereby becomes God, I am afraid that there must be thousands of .new claimants to divinity every day

This exclamation reveals Thomas's newly acquired faith in the resurrection of Jesus. That was the thing he doubted. There was never a question of whether or not Jesus was God. There was only a question of whether or not he was alive. This is what Thomas doubted, this is what Thomas saw with his own eyes and felt with his hands, .and this is what those who did not see Jesus still believed

There is no blessing for those who believe something else (such as that Jesus is God). There is only a blessing for those who believe him to be living. Jesus does not accept Thomas's acknowledgement of him as God, because Thomas never acknowledged .him as God. He only acknowledged him as living

Trinitarian claim: John ۵:۱۶-۱۸. `The Jews did not refer to God

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as `my Father.' Or if they did, they would qualify the statement with `in heaven'. However, Jesus did not do this. He made a claim that the Jews could not misinterpret when he called God `my Father'. Jesus also implied that while God was working, he, the Son, was working too. Again, the Jews understood the implication that he was God's Son. As a result of this statement, the Jews' hatred grew. Even though they were seeking, mainly, to persecute him, they then began to desire to kill him.' .McDowell ۱۹۷۳, ۱۶

Unitarian Answer: The Trinitarian claim is that Jesus must have claimed to be God since some people accused him of this. It does not follow. It is very possible that those people, who in the words of McDowell, `were seeking, mainly, to persecute him', grasped at every opportunity to misconstrue what Jesus said. The scenario must be familiar to everyone. In any verbal argument hostility induces people to misconstrue the words of their opponents. Surely such accusations cannot be taken seriously. Jesus himself does not stand by and accept the accusation, which came more than once. In John ۱۰:۳۳-۳۶, Jesus makes this clear. In the face of unjustified accusation that he makes himself out to be God he says: `Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and

'?sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God

Here Jesus makes the point that to call himself `God'(=Elohim) would not in fact be blasphemy since there is a Biblical precedence for it as applied to all the people. Secondly, he points out that he did not in fact even make that claim, as his accusers maintain, but that he claimed to be the `Son of God'. In making that distinction, Jesus denies that the expression `Son of God' refers to deity. He defines what being the .`Son of God' means: ١) being sanctified by God and ٢) being sent into the world

The fact is that the people could and did misunderstand Jesus' claims. They intended to misunderstand them. Jesus intimates that he may call himself the `Son of God' because God sanctified him and sent him into the world. If he is a personage whom .God sanctified and sent, then he is not God Himself

Trinitarian claim: `Not only did Jesus claim equality with God as his Father, but he also asserted that he was one with the Father... "I and my Father are one". (John ١٠:٣٠).' .McDowell ١٩٧٣, ١۶

Unitarian Answer: Again the misunderstanding of the hostile hearer is taken as evidence that Jesus claims to be God. The supposition is that when Jesus says that he and his Father are one, this means that he claims to be God. But in John ١٧:١١, ٢١-٢٣ Jesus prays that his followers might also be one, even

as `we are'. Therefore, if the oneness of Jesus and the Father implies that Jesus is divine, it also implies that in precisely the same way his followers are also divine. Instead of three persons in the Godhead, we now have millions, maybe billions. There are many ways in which to be one, in purpose, in will, in motive, in action, in many .ways, without being one in essence and being

Trinitarian claim: `Jesus continuously spoke of himself as one in essence and nature with God. He boldly asserted, "If you knew Me, you would know My Father also" (John ۸:۱۹); "He who beholds me beholds the One who sent me" (John ۱۲:۴۵); "He who hates Me, hates My Father also" (John ۱۵:۲۳); "All may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John ۵:۲۳); etc. These references certainly indicate that Jesus looked at himself as .being more than just a man; rather, he was equal with God.' McDowell ۱۹۷۳, ۱۷

Unitarian Answer: In none of these texts does Jesus claim to be one in essence and nature with God. He does claim to be sanctified and sent by God. He thus represents God to his hearers. If they knew and listened to him, they would know God. It is true that to hate and dishonor the messenger of God is to show hatred and dishonor to God Himself. Jesus certainly looked at himself as being

more than just a man. But he did not look at himself as being equal with God. He just does not make that claim. His claims are precisely those made by the Shiite Imams as well. He claims to represent God to humankind and that absolute loyalty and .obedience is therefore his due. But he does not claim to be God

Trinitarian claim: `Jesus claimed to be able to forgive sins... (Mark ۲:۵; see also Luke ۷:۴۸-۵۰). By Jewish law this was something only God could do; Isaiah ۴۳:۲۵ restricts this .prerogative to God alone.' McDowell ۱۹۷۳, ۱۸

Unitarian Answer: It is true that Jesus claimed to be able to forgive sins. It is also true that by Jewish law this prerogative is restricted to God alone especially in view of Isaiah ۴۳:۲۵. The third alternative is that Jesus claims to be the authoritative representative of God to humankind, and as such worthy to represent those powers which God delegated to him (See John ۵:۱۹). He had both power to forgive sin and to heal as delegated to him by God. It was just as much the power of God which healed as which forgave sin at the word of Christ. There is no claim here to be God, despite .the accusation of some onlookers

Trinitarian claim: `Also in the Gospel of Mark we have the trial of Jesus (۱۴:۶۰-۶۴). Those trial proceedings are one of the clearest references to Jesus' claims of deity.' .McDowell ۱۹۷۳, ۲۰

Unitarian Answer: The attempt of the rulers

to fasten a blasphemy charge on Jesus does not prove Jesus' claim to deity. Jesus' clear affirmation of his Messiahship is precisely that: his claim is to be the promised and sent Messiah. He does not claim to be God. There are more than the two alternatives, that Jesus committed blasphemy or that he was indeed God. The third alternative is that he claimed to represent God to the world, to be the divine proof to use Shiite vocabulary, or to be the express image of God or the Word made flesh to use Bible vocabulary. In so doing he only upheld the strictest monotheism and never .claimed to be God

Trinitarian claim: `The biblical evidence in favor of our position shows that early references attributed to God are found in the plural form: Genesis ۱:۲۶: "Let us make man in our image." Genesis ۳:۲۲: "Behold, the man has become like one of Us." Genesis ۱۱:۷: "Come, let Us go down."' Ralph Larson, Water As A Flood, in Land Marks .February ۱۹۹۴, ۱۶

Unitarian Answer: It is true that there are a handful of texts referring to God in the first person plural, generally in the form of `Let's'. But generally, in thousands of cases, the Bible refers to God with a singular. This use of the plural hardly supports .the doctrine of the trinity. If anything, plurality would support polytheism

Genesis ۱:۲۶ uses a third person masculine singular in reference to God. If every ,person in the world who has ever said

Well, let's see now,' has thereby become a trinity, I suppose this text might be` .construed as evidence for the trinity of God

The words in Genesis ٣:٢٢ and ١١:٧ are addressed by God to celestial listeners. Genesis ٣:٢۴ suggests that these might by angels. There are one or two similar references in .the plural which Ralph Larson does not mention

Trinitarian claim: `In Isaiah ۴٨, the One who identifies Himself as the Redeemer and the First and the Last (compare Revelation ١:١١) says in verse ١۶: "The Lord God, and .His Spirit, have sent Me [the Redeemer]".' Ibid

Unitarian Answer: The author infers that the mention of three figures implies a divine trinity. This is known as exegesis, reading one's own ideas into a text. First of all, the Redeemer spoken of here is defined in verse ١٧ as God Himself. This cannot then be the referent of `me' in verse ١۶, because God has sent `me'. God and `me' are two distinct figures, and the Redeemer is God and not `me'. In Isaiah, as in some of the other prophets, the direct quotation of God and the prophet's own reference to himself in the first person, are sometimes difficult to distinguish and can lead to .confusion

We are left with God and His Spirit sending a human figure, not the Redeemer. God and His Spirit are not stated here to be distinct persons in a divine Trinity. The use of the conjunction `and' does not necessarily imply two distinct entities, and if

.it did, it would still not imply that His Spirit was a co-equal divine person

Trinitarian claim: `In Ephesians ۳:۱۴, Paul mentions the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and in verse ۱۶ he adds a reference to the Spirit.' Ibid.

Unitarian Answer: Mention of the three together does not imply a divine trinity, nor that Jesus is divine, or that the Spirit of God is a distinct person.

Trinitarian claim: `Some may respond at this point that they are not challenging the idea of three persons but are only denying that Christ always coexisted with the Father in full equality with Him. We may find help with this question by looking at such Scriptures as these: "For in Him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Colossians ۲:۹. "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." Philippians ۲:۶ KJV.' Ibid.

Unitarian Answer: The author chooses two texts to demonstrate Jesus' equality with God. The first is written to the Colossians to dispel a heresy about which we know little but that it used terminology familiar in Gnostic speculation, such as `pleroma' or fullness. The use of the term pinpoints the area of heresy which the apostle is attempting to replace with faith in Christ. The term does not describe the nature of Christ in general terms as such. However, considering that Jesus is the `express image of God', or a divine proof, such terminology could well be applied to him in his role

of revealing God to humankind. This would not imply, however, that he is himself .equal with God

The text in Philippians gives the humility of Jesus as an example to follow. As a side issue, it is mentioned that he is in the `form of God'. This appears to be a clear reference again to Christ's role as divine proof. The expression does not mean that God appears in a form, but that there is a form which God owns or possesses. There is no implication that God Himself appears in a form. Limitation, by definition, cannot be .attached to God

The expression in this text, `equal with' is a bad translation of a Greek term meaning `like'. We are again confronted with Christ's role as a perfect divine proof or witness of God's existence and attributes. Equality with God is not implied. To associate any .other being as equal with God is to be guilty of polytheism

Trinitarian claim: `For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, .Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.' Isaiah ۹:۶

Unitarian Answer: The argument from Isaiah ۹:۶ is that the child referred to is the promised Messiah, whose many names indicate his divinity. The problem is one of translation. The Hebrew sentence order is generally, as also in this case, one of verb, subject, and object. Another translation would read: `Wonderful, Counselor, The

mighty God, The everlasting Father shall call his name The Prince of Peace'. Even if we accepted the King James translation, however, the fact that someone's name means .Mighty God does not imply that the person is God himself

To be fair, there are texts in the Bible which can be construed to support the doctrine of the trinity. But there are no texts which clearly do so, and none which necessarily do so. It is a historical fact that the idea of one God existing in three persons is outside the Biblical tradition. The Bible presents God as one, a fact acknowledged by both .Judaism and Islam

Divine Guidance

The Islamic principle of divine guidance appears in detail in Tabataba'i ۱۲۳ff. Ali (۱۹۸۸:۸۴a) defines it briefly.

The khilafat-e-Ilahia was the apostleship and after the conclusion of the apostleship" with the Holy Prophet Muhammad, it was conveyed to Imamate, the divinely inspired heavenly guidance through the godly ones purified by God Himself, who were born pure, who lived pure and who surrendered themselves in the way of the Lord in all purity, which historic fact is unanimously acknowledged by the Muslim world as a .whole

Islam demands faith in these Holy Imams as in the apostleship of God, as the all-Truthful, holy and infallible guides divinely commissioned for the preservation of verbal form and the true meanings, both external and internal, of the Holy Qur'an, the final Word of God, as its authentic custodians and the divinely inspired interpreters and the correct models

of godly life on earth to be copied by their devotees. The series of Imamate starts with All ibne Abi Taleb and ends with Muhammad ibnul Hasan Al-Mahdi, the last and ".living Imam of the Age

The salient features of the Imamate as conceived in Islam are therefore that it is a necessary continuation of revelation implied in the institution of prophets. Its representatives are divinely appointed through revelation to their successors. The Imams are pure and infallible. They are custodians and interpreters of the prophetic revelation. They are models of godly life to be copied. They appear in a series of .twelve, and there is always a living one, even if he is in a state of occultation

Prophets can tell us what to do, but may not be able to make us understand in practice how to do it. They can call us away from sin and rebellion against God, but they cannot keep us from falling into formalism and hypocrisy. Humanity needs something more than the revelation brought to the prophets at the hand of angels and inscribed in holy books. We need implementation. In order to do something properly, you need first verbal instructions (the prophets) and then a live demonstration (divine guidance). What God reveals in words by the prophets He .reveals in action, in flesh and blood, by the divine guides

Without divine guidance we cannot apply the true import of the prophetic revelation. `Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Elias, and

said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?' Acts ٨:٣٠-٣١. This statement by the Ethiopian shows clearly that the writings of the prophets are not enough. There must also be a divine guide to .implement them in practice

Throughout the Bible there are figures who are revelations of the will of God in action. Some of these are also prophets, such as Abraham. Abraham was a prophet (Genesis ٢٠:٧), but he was also a demonstration in action, a divine guide. This is shown by his .action in giving his son over to be sacrificed

A prophet brings the verbal principle, but a divine guide applies the theory to practice. Divine guidance sometimes seems to be contrary to the law, especially when the law is interpreted hypocritically or legalistically. Christianity has generally made this mistake. For example, because Jesus rejected the washing of hands before eating, Christians have assumed that he rejected all ablution with the exception of baptism. Mere scholarship and study cannot settle this issue. It would have to be settled by an .authoritative figure

A good example of the principle of divine guidance is in Jesus' judgement of the adulteress in John ٨:١-١١. According to the literal interpretation of the law, she should have been stoned to death. But the divine guide knew the situation. He was able to apply the law both justly and mercifully. He said, ` He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone

.at her.' He neither abandoned the law, nor made an unjust verdict

The knowledge of the divine guide or divine proof comes directly from God. Such a person is able to penetrate the heart of the circumstances and make a just verdict without being taught or informed in human institutions. Jesus is the supreme example of divine proof in the Bible. `But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.' John ۲:۲۴-۲۵. His direct revelation was a source of marvel to the rabbis, who depended on long years of study to acquire the ability to make verdicts. John ۷:۱۵: `And the Jews marveled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never '?learned

According to Islam, God requires adherence to the living witness of his will just as much as to the verbal witness of the prophets. It was not enough for salvation to follow the faith of Adam and Seth: it was essential to follow Noah into the ark. Those who performed their prayers faithfully and claimed to be believers and followers of the one true God, but who failed to enter the ark, drowned. It was not enough to keep the ten commandments in Egypt: it was necessary to follow Moses through the waters of the Red Sea. It was not enough to claim to be the children of Abraham in the first century Ate. It was essential, according to Christian

.Scripture, to accept and follow Jesus Christ

There is a strange aspect of the experience of divine guides in the Bible that sets them apart. That is the experience of occultation, that is, being secretly taken away :from the visible world. There are three examples of this in the Bible

'.Genesis ۵:۲۴. `And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him

Kings ۲:۱۱. `And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there ۲ appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and '.Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven

Acts ۱:۹-۱۱. `And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen '.him go into heaven

Precisely the same kind of occultation is claimed in Islam for the Imam of the Age. Tabataba'i on page ۱۵۴ says, `After the martyrdom of his father, al-'Imam al Mahdi (AS) had al-Ghaybat al-Sughra (the Short Occultation of al Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi [AS]) by the order of Allah and answered the questions of the Shi'as and resolved their problems through Al-Nuwwab al-Arba'ah (the Four Deputies

of Imam al-'Asr (AS) who had successively attained the eminent position of being the Imam's (AS) Deputy. The Imam (AS) then had al-Ghaybat al-Kubra (the Great Occultation of al-'Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi [AS]) until the time when he will appear by the order of Allah to administer justice in the whole world after it gets over... '.whelmed with injustice and oppression

What is above all most important about the divine proof is his authority. Just as it is fatal to reject a true prophet, it is perhaps doubly fatal to reject the divine guide. To reject the divine guide and yet cling to the prophet is to fall into legalism, hypocrisy .and formalism

Jesus said, `All power (Greek: authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth.' Matthew ۲۸:۱۸. Some of the people in Jesus' time did not understand the necessity of following the divinely appointed authority. It was enough for them to have Abraham .as their father

In Matthew ۱۹:۱۶-۲۳ there is the story of a young man who asked Jesus what he should do to have eternal life. Jesus gave him the first step, the answer of the prophets, to keep the commandments. The young man had kept the commandments all his life, but still realized that he lacked something. He asked Jesus what he lacked. Then Jesus revealed the principle of divine guidance in its glorious clarity: Matthew ۱۹:۲۱. `If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in

'.heaven: and come and follow me

The answer is full surrender to the one divinely appointed and sent from God. The criterion is not how well the commandments have been kept. Perfect keeping of the commandments is perhaps worse than none at all, when it allows the individual to think that he has bought God off by well doing. The young man's keeping of the commandments merely contributed to his being lost. It is possible to keep the commandments literally, but we must go beyond keeping the commandments to love God with all the heart and soul and mind. We attain that necessary love in surren… .dering and submitting to the one sent from God

As the Bible presents divine guidance, it is all a matter of relationship. The legalist thinks that it is enough to do the right thing. But if you do the right thing and at the same time ignore and reject the one in flesh and blood who perfectly represents right, it shows that there is no true love of right. Love of ideals and principles is a hateful thing if it is combined with hatred of those people who most perfectly live by those ideals and principles. At the time of Noah, all those who thought it was enough to keep the commandments perfectly were lost. All those who attached themselves to Noah, no matter how imperfectly they carried out the commandments, were saved from the .Flood. It is a matter of attachment

According to the Bible, God has

made it so that we are required to find out who the living divine proof is, and to attach ourselves to him in love, loyalty and obedience. This is why God speaks of those who `love me, and keep my commandments'. It is the attachment of love which comes first and is decisive. The New Testament gives such a role to Jesus. Such loving attachment naturally produces obedience. `The love of Christ constraineth us.' ۲ Corinthians ۵:۱۴.

It is clear at this point that throughout the Bible there appear figures who bring the revelation of God's will into action and practice. In every time period, according to the Bible, those who accepted and followed these divine proofs sent from God were successful in pleasing God and obeying Him. The Bible comes to a climax in a great divine guide, the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. It is the principle of the Imamate, or divine guidance, that makes the entire New Testament relevant. Without such an authority figure, the Hebrew Scriptures, coupled with Rabbinical method, clearly suffice.

The Character and Development of Divine Guidance in Bible History

۱. The Patriarchal Period

Many people immediately think of such things as Shi'ite, fundamentalism, fanaticism and even terrorism when they see the word Imamate. The Bible brings to mind Christian or perhaps Jewish faith. Almost everyone might wonder what connection there is between the Imamate and the Bible.

Once we understand what the Imamate and the Bible really are, the connection between the two begins to appear. The Bible is not the exclusive heritage of Christian and Jew. It is

a collection of writings from the Middle East produced over many centuries. It should not be surprising that the Bible reflects traditions and practices found in any number of religions native to the area. In fact, the books of Moses are more central to .Samaritanism than they are to Christianity, or even Judaism

This study will show how the Bible has molded the concept of Imamate as later known in Islam. I shall not examine the historical development of Shi'ism and try to prove that the Imamate developed directly on the basis of the Bible. It is more realistic to think that the Bible reflects concepts current for centuries in the Middle East. These ideas have influenced both the Bible and the appearance of the Imamate. I want to .point out some of these ideas as they appear in the Bible

The concept of Imamate among Muslims relies on Bible stories and characters. There is, for example, a Muslim belief that God revealed the names of the twelve holy Imams to Adam. This, of course, does not appear directly in the story of Adam in the Bible. Nevertheless, the tree of life, the rivers of Eden, and the naming of the animals .in the Bible story are all related to Muslim beliefs about the Imamate

Before going further, we have to make clear what the Imamate is. The twelve historical figures of authority among the Shi'ites represent the Imamate. Muslims believe that the holy prophet Muhammad at the command of God conferred the

authority of leadership on his cousin and son in-law All-ibn-Abi-Taleb. Those who believe and accept this authority are called Shiites, or partisans of All. Muslims, who do not believe in this God-given government after the prophet, are called Sunnites, because they prefer to restrict themselves to the example or sunna of the prophet alone. The Imamate is God-given authority after the time of the prophet. The word .Imam basically means leader

Ali's two sons in succession, Hasan and Husayn, became Imams after him. After that, each Imam conferred the authority on one of his sons until the full number of twelve Imams was completed with Muhammad Al-Mahdi, who is believed to be still alive in .occultation or hiding

The concept of Imamate is based on the idea that there must be a living person who is a divine proof or demonstration of the existence of God and a vehicle of divine guidance or practical means for carrying out God's sovereign will. It fits into the Shiite configuration of basic faith principles. First is the unity of God, followed by belief in divine justice. Prophethood expresses the belief in verbal or written revelation. The next logical step is practical demonstration of that revelation, and this is the Imamate. Finally, the Day of judgement expresses the principle of human responsibility before .God

By now it is clear what we shall look for in the Bible. We shall look for evidence of God-given leadership authority. That authority will focus on human figures whose lives are evidence

of the existence of God and who have the authority to interpret and apply the verbal revelation. Factors associated with such leadership will be the symbolic value of the number twelve and the strange experience of occultation or hiding. In summary, our examination of the Bible focuses on the following clues of the Imamate: ١. human witnesses to the unity of God; ٢. figures making verdicts on legal application; ٣. figures .in series of twelve; and ۴. occultation

Genesis ١:٢۶ and one or two other verses in Genesis speak of a man as the image of God. Genesis one gives dominion to the man in God's image. This is just about as close to a definition of the Islamic Imamate as we can find anywhere. This aspect of image and dominion comes clearly through to the modern mind even in the West, even among Christians. It is interesting to note that the only dominion actually defined in Genesis one has to do with the sharing of food. One area is given to humankind and one area to other creatures. Yet there is hardly a commentator in existence who recognizes the literal, textual limits of dominion. Nearly everyone jumps to the conclusion of Imamate, that the man has a true leadership role far beyond the .boundaries of food

The principle of God-given leadership is so logical to the human mind that in such circumstances it is able to jump over so many steps of logic to reach it. Nevertheless the reality of God-given

leadership is extremely repugnant in human experience. Of the five principles of Islamic belief, the Imamate is the most difficult for people to grasp and adhere to. That is because people like to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In Genesis two and three the very first story about human beings is of their succumbing to the desire to decide for themselves what is right and wrong, for that is literally what eating from the tree signifies. People prefer to decide for themselves what is right and wrong rather than relying on the whole chain of divine revelation. The verbal revelation is subject to interpretation and leaves loopholes for personal decisions about right and wrong. Verbal revelation lets you talk yourself into almost anything. .Confrontation with a living authority does not

The book of Genesis does not make an overt issue of such authority. It presents the thing as a matter of course. Noah is one of the greatest examples Muslims refer to in presenting the Imamate. Anyone who followed the verbal revelation meticulously, yet failed to enter the ark, was destroyed along with the sinners. This telling argument .summarizes the Bible teaching of the Imamate

There is, however, in the story of Noah a detail much overlooked. How did Noah determine which animals were clean and which were unclean? Up to that point the dominion of food permitted only fruits, grains and nuts for human consumption. Animals are mentioned only in terms of skins and burnt

.offerings

Most Christians are unwilling to postulate a verbal revelation of divine legislation. Most people want to relegate the ten commandments to the time of Moses. Yet even if we presuppose a detailed divine legislation before the time of Noah, there are still always points of practice in determining clean and unclean that require on the spot evaluation. That on the spot evaluation is what most clearly shows Noah to be an .Imam or leader by divine authority

There is an even clearer example in the case of Abraham. Some might suggest that the distinction between clean and unclean we find with Noah, goes back only to Moses. Hardly anyone will want to maintain that lying was forbidden only from the time of Moses. When to hide the truth and when to tell all is precisely a question that verbal revelation can never cover completely. On the spot evaluation is essential. Yet we find both Abraham and Isaac telling their wives to lie about their marriage under .certain circumstances. This is called taqiyyah in Imami practice

The Imam may grant permission to hide the truth or even lie in order to save life. In Genesis ۱۲:۱۱-۱۳ and again in ۲۰:۱۱ Abraham is allowed to make such a fatwah or .verdict. He could only do this if he had God-given authority to do so

These two great examples from the book of Genesis are details often missed by the Christian commentator and even the Jewish one. Judaism has replaced the Biblical ,Imamate with rabbinical method

which is epitomized in the Talmud. The question of the Imamate is precisely, as we shall see, what separated early Christianity from Judaism. At the time of Jesus, rabbinical method was taking over Judaism. Jesus represented the earlier Imami .thought

He claimed to have God-given authority which could override verdicts obtained through scholarly application of the law, and even in a sense the law itself. Nearly every confrontation between Jesus and the people of his day turned on the question of divine authority or rabbinical method. First-century messianism continued better in medieval Islam than in medieval Christianity. Still, the idea of divinely appointed authority comes through in the concept of the bishop of Rome as vicar of the `Son of .'God

So far we have examined legal verdicts that presuppose divine authority. Let us turn to the greater issue of bearing witness to the unity of God. This was the central theme of the experience of Abraham. There are many references in the latter part of the book of Genesis to the `God of the fathers'. This could be interpreted in terms of a totemistic ancestor cult. There is one event in the life of Abraham that prevents such .an interpretation

That is the meeting with Melchizedek in Genesis ۱۴:۱۸-۲۴. Melchizedek was not a part of Abraham's family cult. He was economically and politically viable in himself. He worshipped God under a different name than did Abraham. Up to this point the God of Abraham is called YHWH in the book

of Genesis. The God of Melchizedek is called El-Elyon. In verse nineteen Melchizedek recognizes Abraham as a worshiper of the same God, whom he defines as possessor .of heaven and earth. Here is the idea of a universal God

Abraham in verse twenty-two refers to his own God by the name YHWH, to which he adds significantly, the term of Melchizedek, El Elyon. In so doing Abraham establishes himself as divine proof. This is the best example in the book of Genesis of witness to the one, universal God. The whole book, as we shall see later, nevertheless focuses .on the issue of the unity of God

Thus far we have looked at examples of two Imami criteria in the book of Genesis. Two criteria remain, `twelve' symbolism and occultation. It so happens that the first example of Bible occultation occurs in the book of Genesis. In Genesis ۵:۲۴ we read that 'Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him'. The two figures in the Hebrew Scriptures, Enoch and Elijah, are known in Islamic tradition as Idris and Ilyas or together under the epithet Khidr, the evergreen one. Occultation as an alternative .to death is specifically related to Imami experience in the Bible

The final point is `twelve' symbolism. This is obvious in the book of Genesis for the sons of Jacob. Christians will perhaps remember that Ishmael also had twelve sons. The twelve sons of Ishmael are the point of departure for `twelve' symbolism. All other series

of twelve that come after them are dependent on them. The long description of the births of the sons of Jacob and the significance of their names are an attempt at imitating the list of Ishmael's sons, whose names are also significant. Strangely enough, the Bible does not carry through consistently on giving the names of the twelve sons of Jacob wider significance. The meanings of these names relate to the .story of their own lives and not to a greater, spiritual truth

Liberal researchers will find another difficulty with the names of the tribes. There are in fact thirteen tribes rather than twelve. The Bible uses two means to resolve this. The first is by dropping a name, that is Levi. The other is by relegating two names, Ephraim and Manasseh, back to an original father, Joseph. Because Ishmael had twelve sons whose names had spiritual significance, Jacob had to have twelve sons too. Because the Ishmaelites were divided into twelve tribes, the Israelites had to have twelve tribes too. They skewed reality to make it work, and by so doing reaffirmed the significance of the number twelve in connection with God-given .authority

Here are the Bible texts for each version of the twelve tribes of Israel. One group contains the names Levi and Joseph: Genesis ۳۵:۲۳-۲۶; ۴۹:۳-۲۸; Deuteronomy ۲۷:۱۲۱۳; ۱ Chronicles ۲:۱-۲; Ezekiel ۴۸:۳۰-۳۴; Revelation ۷:۵-۸. The other group contains instead the names Ephraim and Manasseh: Numbers ۱:۵-۱۶; ۱۹-۴۴; ۲:۱-۳۴; ۷; ۱۰:۱۴-۲۸; ۱۳:۴-۱۵; ۳۴:۱۷-۲۹. All thirteen tribes are mentioned in

.Numbers ۲۶:۵-۶۲

The Islamic Imams have reigns somewhat like a line of kings. That is, the term of an Imamate runs from the death of the preceding Imam. The book of Genesis runs through twenty-one generations of patriarchs from Adam to the sons of Jacob. The fact that there were twenty-one generations obscures the fact that there are precisely twelve periods of the Imamate from Adam to Jacob. A table of birth and .death dates for the first twenty generations will show this

I do not mean to imply anything about the historical accuracy of these dates. I merely point out that, as they are presented in the book of Genesis (chapter five and follow-ing), they express twelve succeeding periods of Imamates running from expressed death date to expressed death date. The symbolic number twelve is thus embedded .in the Genesis story

The list of names in the first column goes from father to son with the exception of Ishmael and Isaac, who are both sons of Abraham. A number of interesting issues appear from the death dates. The first six generations are clear. These are Adam, Seth, Enos, Cainan, Mahalaleel, and Jared. Each succeeding generation outlives the earlier and there is no break in the Imamate. The problem with the seventh generation is interesting. It is interesting first of all because the number seven is also a sacred number. This appears already in Genesis four which focuses on Lamech, the seventh generation. It appears even earlier in the seven days of the

creation story. The seventh Shiite Imam is the one giving most problems as well. The majority accept twelve Imams including Musa al-Kadhim as the seventh. The Ismailis retain his elder brother, who died before his father, as the seventh and final Imam. The problem with Enoch in the seventh generation is that he was occulted during the Imamate of Seth, nearly five hundred years before he might have been eligible for .the Imamate himself

The Imamate passes on to Methuselah, the eighth generation and the seventh Imam. Since he outlives his son, the Imamate passes to his grandson Noah in ۱۶۵۶, the year of the Flood. So in the first ten generations there are only eight Imami reigns. Another interesting fact is that the lifetimes overlap to the extent that Adam, who died in ۹۳۰, could have been personally known to Lamech, who was born in ۸۷۴. Noah is the first generation not to have the possibility of having known Adam. Noah was born in the .second Imamate, that of Seth

A new and interesting problem arises after Noah. Noah had an immense choice in successors. According to the text, Noah in fact outlived Peleg, his great-great-great-grandson, and even Nahor, the great-grandson of Peleg and grandfather of Abraham. When Noah died, Abraham was ۵۸ years old. The other aspect of the problem is that .the direct following of generations in the Imami reigns would pass over Abraham

In ۲۰۰۶ Shem would normally become Imam. Since Shem died in ۲۱۵۸, the oldest

living in line would be Eber, who died in ٢١٨٧, after the death of both Abraham and Ishmael. The Imamate should then have gone to Ishmael's oldest son. The reason for the inclusion of such an extensive story of Abraham in the book of Genesis must partially at least be in explanation of why the Imamate went to Isaac instead of .Nebajoth, the eldest son of Ishmael

We are thus faced with alternate and perhaps rival lines of the Imamate after Noah. In one we have Noah, Shem, Eber, and Nebajoth. In the other line we postulate that Noah overrode the other generations and chose Abraham as his successor. This would explain why Abraham acts as an Imam. It would also explain the rivalry between Ishmael and Isaac, if such in fact actually existed. In that case Isaac may have taken the Imamate after the death of Ishmael. The line would thus be Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, a total of twelve Imams in all. The rivalry would thus .be between the Shem-Eber line on one hand and the Abraham-Ishmael on the other

The call of Abraham could very well fit into a rivalry between Abraham and Shem. The flight into Palestine made the dual reign possible. It in turn provided a good reason for Abraham to leave his own country. The dialogue between Abraham and God could very well fit into God's answer to Abraham's prayer that Ishmael be considered in the Imamate after him. God's emphasis of Isaac could very

well be prophetic of the reconciliation between the two lines if Eber chose the docile Isaac over Ishmael's line. Isaac was after all married to a woman from a family which would presumably have followed Shem and Eber. The whole problem arose because of the many generations covered by the Imamate of Noah, and the fact even that .some generations died before Noah himself

The rivalry between Jacob and Esau also has Imami ramifications. Of course Esau as the elder had pretensions to the Imamate. Their reconciliation took place before Jacob actually stepped into the Imamate. In Genesis ۲۸:۹ we find that Esau married the sister of Nebajoth, who also had pretensions to the Imamate. This was in the backlash that took place when Esau noticed that Isaac intended to give the Imamate to Jacob even though he had sought the blessing through deceit. The connection of Esau with the Ishmaelite line might indicate that Rebecca represented the earlier Mesopotamian claims. Rebecca would thus be expected to prefer an Ishmaelite to Isaac as her husband. The intricate marriage consultation in Genesis twenty-four may be in view of convincing the family of Rebecca that Isaac was the valid Imam rather than Nebajoth. So the claims of Ishmael and Abraham may have been the root of the contention between Jacob and Esau. Esau would have fallen back on the .original loyalty of his mother's family in order to gain status

A final point remains unmentioned in Genesis. That is the matter of Nebajoth and

Kedar, the second son of Ishmael. There is little evidence that Nebajoth or Kedar ever contended for the Imamate. Other portions of the Hebrew Scriptures, however, suggest that the Ishmaelite line may have continued through Kedar as well. Kedar .and not Nebajoth is the forebear of the prophet Muhammad

Kedar especially appears again and again. They are both praised most highly: Isaiah ۴۲:۱۱; ۶۰:۷. Kedar is faithful to God even when Israel has completely forsaken the faith. Jeremiah ۲:۱۰. Finally, Kedar will be a witness against Tyre in the Day of Judgement. .Ezekiel ۲۷:۲۱

The Imami concern clarifies the Genesis narratives. The marriage of Isaac is a case in point. One of the longer chapters in the Bible, Genesis ۲۴, is reserved to describe the event. Why is the marriage of Isaac so important? The reason is that it joins and reconciles the two rival Imami lines. Every detail of Eliezer's journey confirms this. Point after point is made to convince the family of Rebecca that the marriage is the will of God. No other family in Genesis required such proofs. There was something at .stake far beyond a mere marriage. It was the Imamate

The lifetime disagreement between Rebecca and Isaac confirms this. But the story of Jacob reveals a new aspect. The Imamate has already been separated from an automatic descent through the eldest son. Now the moral aspect of the Imamate appears in the history of the lives of Jacob's sons. The elder sons fail to exhibit Imami character. Simeon

and Levi break a sworn agreement. Judah messes up his family life and has a son with his son's wife. Reuben sleeps with his father's wife. Whether or not we accept the historicity of these stories, their purpose is to show that these men, although the elder brothers, were inferior to Joseph. Joseph's morality is tested and shown to be perfect. .The Imamate is based not only on lineage, but on moral perfection

The family of Jacob finally gives a reason why Noah might have overlooked Shem and made Abraham his successor in the Imamate. The family of Laban, which presumably represented the Imamates of Shem and Eber, was polytheistic. Laban was the brother of Rebecca and the father of Leah and Rachel, Jacob's wives. This polytheism is evident in Rachel's stealing of the images (Genesis ۳۱:۳۲). The text shows clearly that polytheism was kept secret from Jacob, which in turn shows that Jacob was .adamantly monotheistic

The polytheism of Laban may well have begun very early on, even during the time of Shem. Polytheism would have been a very good reason for Noah choosing Abraham, the monotheist, as his Imami heir. The holy Qur'an in fact gives this as the reason. Abraham's flight from Mesopotamia was the direct result of the conflict between faith .in one God and polytheism

In summary, the twenty generations mentioned in Genesis represent twelve Imami periods. The stories that follow seem to center on rival Imami claims. These rival claims appear in the case of Abraham and

Ishmael, but seem to be reconciled in Isaac because of his position in the lineage, his docility, and his marriage to Rebecca. Moral perfection replaces the role of lineage in .the Imami concern in the story of Jacob's sons

We have outlined the essentials of what can be gleaned from the book of Genesis in reference to the Imamate using a scholarly methodology that is acceptable in Western circles. This is not to say that the details of possible rivalry are demonstrated with any certainty. At this point, however, I shall turn to a Hurufi methodology. I shall examine the meaning of the names of Ishmael's sons. Then I shall step further into .the methodology and faith of the past by examining a text from a Hurufi point of view

In order, the names mean as follows: Ishmael = God hears,Nebajoth brought forth, fruitfulness; Kedar = ash coloured, dark; Adbeel = disciplined of God; Mibsam = fragrant;Mishma = hearing; Dumah = silence; Massa = burden, tribute; Hadar = majesty; Tema = sunburnt; Jetur = encircled, enclosed; Naphish = breathed, refreshed; Kedema precedence, help. The faith of the patriarchs is defined in contrast to the faith of Cain's civilization in Genesis ۴:۲۶ as calling on the name of the Lord, or dhikr as it is known in Islamic practice. This most primitive religious practice gives rise to the name Ishmael, God hears (our calling on his name). God's hearing our call .results in a twelve-step spiritual development

The first step is fruitfulness, the immediate

stimulation of the spiritual practice. This soon subsides into the real work of dhikr. The first symbol of this is darkness, then discipline. After this trial the soul is rewarded with more substantial progress in fragrance. Fragrance is followed by the experiences of hearing and silence, tribute and majesty. The second cycle of discipline finds a symbol in the sunburnt arid seclusion. This is followed by the second reward in refreshment and help. These four alternating cycles of discipline and reward correspond to the .mystical four gates and the four elements, earth, water, fire and air

There is an Islamic story about Adam. When Adam ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, his skin became discolored. Then God gave him the names of the twelve holy Imams. After reciting these for some time, his skin regained .its natural color. The Bible refers to this discoloration as nakedness

The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil represent two different ways of achieving a verdict. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents the desire to be able to distinguish right from wrong for oneself. Such independence is the root of all false religions ancient and modern. The tree of life represents reliance on divine authority and setting aside one's own ideas of right and wrong. The tree of .life represents the Imamate or divinely established authority

In Genesis ۲:۹ the tree of life is mentioned for the first time. It

is called `eets hakhayyim in the original Hebrew. The phrase `tree of life' in Hebrew contains seven letters. These seven letters are remarkable from a Hurufi point of view. They are in order: `ayin, tsade, he, khet, yod, and mem. The yod is repeated, so .there are seven letters in all, the number of perfection

Although there are twelve Imams, there are only six names, three of which are used more than once. Four of the Imams are named Ali, two are named Hasan, and three are named Muhammad. The names Husayn, Ja’far and Musa are each used once. The letter that begins the names Hasan and Husayn does not occur in Hebrew. In Hebrew he and khet are used instead. So the two letters he and khet can account for the initial letters of Hasan and Husayn. The name All begins with 'ayan. The names Musa and .Muhammad begin with mem

There is only one name left, Ja’far. The cognate letter in Hebrew for the initial of this name is gimel, which does not occur in this phrase. Ja’far, however, is commonly known by the epithet Sadiq. The word Sadiq, truthful, begins with tsade in Hebrew. A Shiite will immediately see the significance of this name being the hidden one, since this particular Imam is of strategic importance in the historical development of Imami practice. So the initials of the names of the twelve holy Imams are hidden in the .'phrase `tree of life

The initials of these six names spell out

the words `tree of life.' The order is not chronological, however. The first word `tree' is made up of the initials of All and Sadiq. All is the first Imam and Sadiq the central Imam in regard to practice. The second word, `life', begins with the letters of Hasan and Husayn, who represent the two sides of righteous life, reconciliation and revolt against oppression. The seventh and final letter, mem, is the initial of both Muham… mad and Musa. Musa is the seventh Imam. Muhammad is the name of the last Imam. So the positions of the letters are logical. When the initials of the names of the twelve holy Imams are set out in a sense logical rather than chronological pattern, they spell .'the Hebrew words `tree of life

Two letters remain unmentioned. These are the two yod in the middle of the word .`life'. Two yod are used in Hebrew as the abbreviation for the name of God

The tree of life appears throughout the Bible as a symbol of the Imamate. It is the introductory figure of the Zabur or Book of Psalms. Psalm one describes the perfect man, the one who puts into practice the verbal revelation. Verse three refers to him .as the tree of life, the tree whose leaves do not wither

The Imamate appears in Jesus' sermon on the mount. Jesus refers to the prophet to follow after him as the tree of life. Jesus offers the fruit of this tree as evidence that he is a

.true prophet

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they` are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit.' Matthew ٧:١٥-١٧. Revelation ٢٢:٢ tells us how many fruits there are on the tree of life. `In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits.' So we find that the prophet to come after Jesus is .known by the twelve fruits which he produced, the twelve holy Imams

The story of the Patriarchs in the Bible is largely the story of divine proof and divine guidance. As we dig under the surface of these stories, we find more and more details which suggest that a fundamental concern of these people was the Imami progression. This concern translated itself into the keeping of genealogies, the transmission of stories about early divine guidance, and the gathering of evidence of authority as conflicting claims arose. Without the concern for Imami authority, the .story of Abraham might not have been preserved

The Judges .٢

We have seen some aspects of the lives of the Patriarchs that do not immediately meet the eye. An example of this is the fact that according to the Bible, Noah's death is dated in the fifty-eighth year of Abraham. Some readers of Genesis might be quite surprised by that fact. The

reason for this is that the book of Genesis has an entirely different purpose as it now stands. It was not originally written to portray a concern with the Imamate. Although that concern appears to be of prime importance in the stories themselves and probably in their early survival, the book of Genesis is put together in another way.

Perhaps the best way of illustrating this is with the way the symbolic numbers are used in Genesis. The deepest level of Genesis focuses on the number twelve. This is the number of sons of Jacob and Ishmael, and the number of successive generations of the Patriarchs. The second level is seven. Some liberal scholars suggest that the seven-day creation story is a late addition. The number seven is important in the Flood story as well. Jacob served seven years for his wives. Genesis four focuses on the seventh generation in the line of Cain, and Genesis five on the seventh generation in the line of Seth. The surface structure of the book of Genesis superimposes a different symbolic number. That is the number ten.

Since seven and twelve are numbers having to do with the Imamate, we can conclude that the Imamate is a consideration embedded in the stories of Genesis themselves. The number ten does not relate to the Imamate. Its most direct relationship is with the decalogue or ten commandments. The ten commandments are the heart of the books of Moses. The book of Genesis in its present form is

arranged in the Mosaic tradition and not the patriarchal tradition. It is edited as an introduction to the ten commandments following along in the next book of Moses, the .book of Exodus

The number ten is superimposed by the Mosaic tradition upon the stories of the book of Genesis. We find this especially in two areas. The first and most obvious is the .division of genealogies by tens. The first genealogy of ten is in Genesis five

The second one is in Genesis ۱۱:۱۰-۲۶. The second area in which the number ten is superimposed on the book of Genesis is structural. The book is divided into ten very uneven sections with an introduction. Each section begins with the words `these are the generations of... or toldot. The whole book is thus structured in ten separate narratives, all but the first of which are named for the principal character. These ten section divisions are found in Genesis ۲:۴, ۵:۲, ۶:۹, ۱۰:۱, ۱۱:۱۰, ۱۱:۲۷, ۲۵:۱۲, ۲۵:۱۹, ۳۶:۱, and .۳۷:۲

The ten sections of Genesis are not chosen haphazardly. They are clearly of two genres. There are five genealogies and five narratives. An examination of these might give an idea of what the Mosaic tradition is all about. The book of Genesis can then be set in the context of the whole. Although it is fortuitous that the books of Moses are divided into five books, the logical development of the message can still be seen to advance roughly in terms of this division. There

.is a specific, central message of each book

The structure of the creation story in Genesis ۱:۱-۲:۳ is an obvious attempt at giving the Sabbath a cosmic foundation. But even more fundamental in the story is the message that all existing things are created by one God. This one, universal God is the central theme of Genesis. With awesome clarity, Genesis four shows the failure of civilization to deal with so basic a problem as fratricide. Lamech's despairing lament is followed by the austere comment: `Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.' Genesis ۴:۲۶. The first verse of Genesis five sets God above the passing generations of men. The central theme of the Flood story is a God who can and will .judge the whole world

We have already seen how Abraham rose above cultural and national divisions to affirm the unity of God. The story of Abraham is reported with such detail partly because it strikes so directly to the heart of polytheism. The basis of polytheism is the functional division of gods. Ancient man in the Middle East believed that every place was governed by the god of that place. Piety was defined as recognizing whatever .gods reigned in the place you were

When Abraham went from Mesopotamia to Palestine, piety required that he leave the gods of his fathers and serve the gods of the land. This was an unquestioned and unquestionable mindset. The story of Abraham must have seemed like the wildest science fiction

even three thousand years ago. The mind to invent it would have been admired for incredible imagination. But more important was the unequalled daring, not to mention impiety, of a man who travelled about and worshipped only one God. This is far more startling than the modern rise of atheism. It is the central issue of the book of Genesis that must have struck the ancient audience more than anything else. The fact that we .hardly notice it today only shows how different we are from ancient peoples

The unity of God in the book of Genesis is the central theme. This central theme of Genesis becomes the axiomatic point of departure in the book of Exodus. When God appears to Moses in the burning bush, the fact of God's unity is already established. Another issue appears, the issue of justice for the oppressed. Moses goes to Pharaoh with the message of God, `Let my people go'. The structure of the book of Exodus is in two parts, divided at the giving of the ten commandments in chapter twenty. The ten commandments are the heart of the book. The Decalogue defines divine justice. .The story of deliverance from oppression is followed by the legislation of justice

The second half of the book of Exodus looks back on the justice of God in another way. It centers on the building of the sanctuary, `that I may dwell among them'. The last half of the book seems to be dealing with the other side

of the coin of divine justice. The other side of the coin is not mercy, although this is an issue throughout the book. It is divine consistency. It is the fact that God can be trusted to be consistent. This is perhaps best brought out in the middle of the sanctuary story when God told Moses He would destroy the people for the sin of worshipping the golden calf. It is Moses who shows mercy. God gives evidence of extraordinary consistency. The whole book of Exodus is an amazing treatise on the .justice of God

The book of Leviticus is a book of ordinances and legislation. The whole book is summed up in Leviticus ۱۰:۱۰, `That ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean.' The emphasis is on verbal revelation of the will of .God, the central role of a prophet

The last book of Moses, called Deuteronomy, is made up almost entirely of Moses' farewell speech. Time and again Moses sets forth obedience to God and disobedience. He draws a contrast between success and failure, punishment and reward. The focus is on blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. The .book comes to a climax in the Song of Moses in chapter thirty-two

Much of the song is couched in the words of God, who finally says, `See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there

any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live forever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgement; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy.' The central issue of the book of Deuteronomy is divine judgement.

The books of Moses, the Torah or Taurat, develop this grand theme. The unity of God logically leads to the realization that God is just. God's consistency logically leads to the verbal revelation of God's will. The revelation of God's will logically comes to the Day of judgement, the realization of human responsibility before God. But the fourth book remains unmentioned. This is the book of Numbers, the book of the Imamate. The central theme of the book of Numbers is the Imamate.

Almost every passage in the book of Numbers fits into one of two themes: the first theme is the assignment of people to specific roles. The second is the description of Moses' defense of the role of leadership. Both of these themes are overtly Imami. The idea that God has assigned certain human beings to a specific leadership role is not far from the idea that God has assigned every human being, in fact, all created things,

to a specific place in creation. Of course Moses' defense of the role of leadership is a .defense and reaffirmation in every case of the Imamate itself

With the possible exception of Numbers five, nine and ten, the first part of the book fits into the first theme, the assignment of people to specific roles. The first defense of the Imamate in Numbers begins in chapter eleven and culminates in chapter twelve. The rebellion comes from Moses' own brother and sister. Miriam voices the revolt in the following words, `Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?' Numbers ١٢:٢. Miriam understood the role of the prophet very well. The prophet is one through whom God speaks to the people. She failed to grasp the importance of the Imamate. In this she was like many people today, who recognize the prophet, but not the Imam. She felt that she and Aaron should have equal leadership with Moses because God also spoke through them. They recognized that Moses enjoyed a position of leadership that they did not participate in, but they did not understand that this leadership of Moses was God-given and sacred. The punishment of Miriam was a clear affirmation of the Imami principle and the specific .role of Moses in filling it at that time

Numbers thirteen tells the story of the twelve spies. Moses sent a representative from each tribe to view the land of Canaan. All spies brought back a good report of

the land, but only Caleb and Joshua were ready to enter it. The others were afraid of the inhabitants. They instigated a rebellion against Moses. Again Moses had to come to the defense of his divinely appointed leadership. This story also lays the .groundwork for Moses' successor in the Imamate, who turned out to be Joshua

Chapter fifteen is legislative, but leads into chapter sixteen. A new attack on the Imamate comes in the rebellion of Korah. This was a rebellion of princes in the congregation. They set themselves not only against the Mosaic Imamate but the Aaronic priesthood. Again God takes the initiative and affirms the divine authority of .Moses' leadership by destroying the rebels

Chapter eighteen returns to the first theme along with legislation. Chapter twenty returns to the defense of the Imamate in the event of the water from the rock in Meribah. This chapter draws a clear distinction between the prerogatives of the Imam and the prerogatives reserved for God Himself. As such it forms a logical sequence to .the development of the Imamate

The confirmation of the Imamate continues in chapter twenty-one. The episode of the fiery serpents inspires the people to recognize their sin both against God on one hand, and against His appointed leader on the other. `We have spoken against the '.Lord, and against thee

The episode of Balaam is a sort of interlude in the Imami development of the book of Numbers. It has its place, however, because the blessings Balaam is forced to pronounce

over Israel have Imami force. They culminate in the great prophecy, `Out of Jacob .shall come he that shall have dominion.' Numbers ۲۴:۱۹

Numbers twenty-six returns to the first theme. But in chapter twenty-seven the Imamate is affirmed in a surprising and delightful way. The daughters of Zelophehad sue for inheritance. This situation illustrates most strikingly how verbal legislation cannot be enough. There must be an on the spot evaluation in order for justice to .come about

The women receive their inheritance because Imami intervention was able to .supersede the law

Following this event, it seems that Moses himself realized more than ever the necessity of the continuing Imamate. Numbers ۲۷:۱۶-۱۷ contains the great Imami prayer of Moses. `Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the '.Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd

Numbers ۲۷:۱۸-۲۳ describes Moses' appointing of Joshua as his successor in the position of leadership. Joshua's leadership is described in the Biblical book of Joshua. After that the leadership role passed down through a series of people called judges. These are given along with some of their exploits in the book of judges. The interest-.ing thing about the book of Judges is the fact that there are twelve of them

The writer of the book seemed to think that a

series of twelve such functionaries was the only appropriate one. He could have construed the judges to be fifteen, since Joshua preceded them and they were followed apparently by Eli and Samuel. The twelve figures of the book of judges are Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, .and Samson

At this point we have seen how the books of Moses or Taurat include the Imamate as the fourth in a series of five great themes. We have seen how the fourth book of Moses, the book of Numbers, centers on the Imamate throughout, defining it and defending it. Finally, we have seen how the role of leadership was passed on from Moses to others, first Joshua and then the twelve judges described in the book of .judges

We can now pass on to examine some Imami actions among these people. These will be authoritative applications of the law. In the patriarchal series we found the witness of the one, universal God, the distinction between clean and unclean, and the practice of taqiyyah or concealing the truth to save life. These Imami actions are found among .the Mosaic figures to be sure. But with Moses there is a new kind of Imami action

Already in the experience of Noah the need arose for a means of reducing violence. There was no legal verdict, and the result was the Flood and the introduction of the Imami role of deliverer in its most primitive form. With Moses, the Imami role of

deliver is fully developed. After the Flood new legislation provided for the execution of murderers. The purpose of this was to prevent murder. The legislation itself, however, seems in conflict with the commandment of the decalogue 'Thou shalt not kill'. In any particular case, only an Imami verdict can tell us when the execution of a .murderer can legally take place

Probably one of the most often pondered questions of the Bible is the problem of violent warfare. Many a man has spent his life looking for a way of reconciling violent warfare with the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill'. Many solutions have been offered, but few of them satisfy. Many Jewish commentators suggest that the .'commandment means 'Thou shalt not murder

Such readers mean that other killing does not break the commandment. Few Christians are satisfied with that. Generally Christians see the practice of the Hebrew Scriptures as primitive and an advance in the grace and mercy of the Gospel. Besides being parochial, such an explanation ignores the true depth of the Hebrew Scriptures .on one hand, and their real emphasis on grace and mercy on the other

Perhaps the straightest way of coming to the answer is by understanding that God is not bound by His own commandments. The commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' is addressed not to God, but to people. At the command of God, God's representative on earth, the Imam or divinely appointed leader of any given time, may either kill or command to kill without breaking

the commandment. The absolute commandment is 'Thou shalt not kill'. If, however, .circumstances warrant it, God Himself can override the commandment

When this type of Imami action began with Moses, almost every execution or war was carried out directly through the intervention of God Himself. Examples of this are the drowning of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea, and the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. Nevertheless, action by the congregation or even individuals can be found. In Leviticus ۲۴:۱۴ the congregation stones a blasphemer, and in Numbers ۲۵:۸ Phinehas .kills an Israelite and the woman who had seduced him into idolatry

Of course the principle is clear. All legislation is at the point in the chain of revelation just preceding the Imamate. An ordinary individual does not have the right to apply the legislation to practice. He must approach it through the Imamate or divinely appointed leader. There is not a conflict between law and Imamate. We do not have the right to judge either of them, for there is no standard for such judgement. Rather, revelation comes to us in a chain, first of all, the law, and secondly, the Imamate, .through which the law applies in our practice

Here is an illustration. We read the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill'. In a particular situation the reigning Imam tells certain people to kill certain others. If we do not understand the Imami principle, we will wonder why the divinely appointed leader is .inconsistent with the commandment

,If we understand the Imami principle

we understand that the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' is part of the verbal revelation on which the Imam makes his verdict. But there are many other verbal legislations which we might overlook that also contribute. Finally, the Imam's direct assessment of the particular situation is crucial as well. When the Imam puts all of .these together, his verdict is the consistent and relevant sum of divine revelation

The same principle holds true with all verbal commandments. The commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' is the one that especially becomes visible in the Mosaic series. Nothing is more typical of the period of Joshua than warfare and violence. The name .Joshua means `God delivers'. He is the prototype successor of Moses

All twelve Imami figures in the book of judges are of the same type. They are deliverers. Their main function is to kill as many enemies of the worshipers of God as possible. This is not inconsistent with the chain of Biblical revelation nor with the .'commandment 'Thou shalt not kill

In the area of Imami verdicts, the Bible sets forth the ones most central to practical needs. If we approach the verbal divine revelation for ourselves, we can often draw valid conclusions on what behavior is required. But sometimes in practice the matter .of what is clean and unclean, as with Noah, requires an on the spot evaluation

The verbal legislation does not cover the details of everything that is right or wrong. Without divine leadership, we would now and then

run into trouble knowing what to do. Next comes, with Abraham and Isaac, the issue of taqiyyah. Without Imami guidance we would be forced to reveal everything we know in every situation, or else take it upon ourselves to make legislative application. These two doubtful areas are the basic ones. Imami leadership makes verdicts on the details of legislation (what is right and wrong) and on the application of legislation (what principle is appropriate to a specific situation). The matter of violent warfare .falls into the latter class

I fully realize that people unaccustomed to the concept of divine leadership will have difficulty grasping these principles. They will still have problems with Abraham and Isaac and struggle with the idea that they told their wives to lie. They will still have .problems with violent warfare in the Bible

I shall approach this difficulty in two steps. First, we must realize that our verdicts on what is right and wrong are not the criteria. We may think that violent warfare is always wrong, but we do not have the right to that opinion unless we reject Biblical authority. The tragedy of Saul reveals this clearly: ١ Samuel ١۵. The phrase `to obey is .better than sacrifice' has become proverbial

God took the kingdom away from Saul, because he had pity on the enemy and did not kill them all as God commanded. God gave the kingdom to someone who would obey and kill those whom God said to kill. This is the Bible

thought. Whether or not we like it, that fact is inescapable. In order to understand divine leadership we have to get used to the idea that a command of God is valid .whether we like it or not

The second step towards comprehension is to realize that our perception of reality is limited. Conflict between the verbal revelation and the practical application arises in our own minds through ignorance of both which legislation is applicable and what the whole situation is. Seeing a part of the whole, we draw conclusions different from .those of the divine leader

Rather than accusing Abraham or Isaac of fostering falsehood, we should understand that the fault is in our own ignorance. When we perceive the divine guide as inconsistent, he is in fact carrying out the will of God. To do as we think he should do would be disobedience. When Saul saved the enemy king alive, he was disobeying the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill'. He was taking the commandment out of its .revelatory and practical context. To misapply it is to disobey it

The problem of violent warfare or even violent acts is perfectly resolved in the Imamate. The pacific principle in practice, however, prevails. Only warfare or violent acts commanded by the reigning divine leader are valid. Since governments on earth today do not even make the pretense of a claim to divine guidance, participation in their armies and warfare is forbidden. One may fight only at the command of a Moses or

.a David

Seen from this point of view, the exploits of Samson can be enjoyed and applauded for the mighty feats of honor which they are. This need not, does not detract from our consistent application of the Imami principle, which prevents us from participating in warfare or violence. On the other hand, according to Biblical principles, if the true divine leader of today mediated a command from God to kill, we would have the duty .of endeavoring to obey it

The Kings .۳

We have seen how the concept of the Imamate has developed in the Bible. The basic ideas appear from the beginning. These are the witness of the one, universal God; the practical, authoritative application of verbal legislation; the experience in some cases .of occultation; and the tendency to find series of twelve

The patriarchal period presents Noah as an Imam in the deliverer role. The problem was violence and the solution was legislation to deter the murderer by the death sentence. The Imami role in salvation came into its own with Moses and the judges who followed. Violent warfare became more and more a part of an Imam's task as a .deliverer

This extraordinary role continued with the kings. The kings, however, introduced a different emphasis. Without neglecting deliverance through warfare, they made verdicts on day-to-day issues. The continuing, routine influence of the Imamate took its place alongside its extraordinary role. The Imamate took on an ever-increasing .content and importance

As we move away from the patriarchal period, there are fewer and fewer

figures who combine the roles of prophet and Imam as did Abraham and Moses. Nevertheless, the prophetic role of the first kingly Imam, David, is important. The only king after David who was a prophet as well as an Imam was his son Solomon. Jesus also combined the two roles. But most of the kingly Imams found themselves working side by side with prophets. This of course lent a unique character to the Imamate of .this period

Judaism and Christianity have done the world a disservice in separating the faith of Jesus from the history of the prophets and kings. The Gospel presents Jesus as the son of David, thus tying this Imami line into one. The message of Jesus differed from rabbinical Judaism precisely on the question of the Imamate. The Imamate was conservative and represented the older faith. Rabbinicism was something new, the product of lost Jewish national independence. Jesus and John represented the old faith of prophets and kings. To separate them from that history is to concede the .claims of rabbinicism

The occultation events during this long period are our first concern. There are two of them. The first is the occultation of Elijah, described in ۲ Kings ۲. Elijah appeared in consultation with Jesus in the transfiguration, described in Matthew ۱۷:۱-۱۳; Mark ۹:۲-۱۳; and Luke ۹:۲۸-۳۶. Elijah, like Enoch before him, was a prophet rather than an Imam. Occultation of an Imam had to wait for Jesus, who was the second case of occultation .in this period

We

have seen that the symbolic number twelve begins with the number of the sons of Ishmael. The number of the tribes of Israel and the number of judges are manipulated to follow the symbolic pattern. The number twelve is embedded in the .twenty-one generations listed in Genesis

In the same way the sacred number twelve is embedded in the list of kings of Judah, the line of David. If we take the whole list from the books of Kings and Chronicles we find the following twenty-one kings. The kings are each evaluated in the Scriptures as either good or wicked kings. I have marked the good kings with a plus sign (+). David+, Solomon+, Rehoboam+, Abijah+, Asa+, Jehoshaphat+, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Jehoash+, Amaziah+, Uzziah+, Jotham+, Ahaz, Hezekiah+, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah+, Jehoahaz, .Jehoiakim, Jehoiakhin, Zedekiah. There are twelve good or Imami kings

A host of prophets confront the twenty-one kings. Some of them left writings which have not survived. More than twelve of them left writings in the Hebrew Scriptures. Nevertheless, the books are arranged in the Hebrew Scriptures in such a way that twelve short prophetic books are grouped together. They are .called the twelve minor prophets. These are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. The other prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel are gathered separately. So the compilers of the Scriptures .recognized a need for arranging in a series of twelve

The book of Psalms or Zabur also shows a concern for the number

twelve. The Psalms are gathered from earlier collections. Each collection shows a concern for number symbolism in the number of Psalms included. The Psalms are divided into five books, like the books of Moses. The first originally contained forty Psalms. The second originally contained thirty, the first two books totaling seventy. The whole collection contains one hundred and fifty Psalms, one Psalm in the first book divided into two (Psalms nine and ten) and one in the second book (Psalms ۴۲ and ۴۳), thus bringing the total up to one hundred and fifty.

There are eleven Psalms with twelve verses each, although several Psalms of thirteen verses might fit into the series. There are eleven Psalms for the sons of Korah, although Psalm ۴۳ seems to have been detached from Psalm ۴۲, thus making an undesignated twelfth. Finally there are clearly twelve Psalms of Asaph.

The text of the Psalms is mostly written in the first person, I, and is addressed to either God or people, sometimes the congregation and sometimes wicked people. This is the speech of the Psalmist. There are only a few places in the Psalms where God speaks directly. These are Psalm ۱۵:۲-۵; ۴۶:۱۰(۱۱); ۵۰:۵-۲۳; ۷۵:۲-۸; ۸۱:۶-۱۶; ۸۲:۲-۷; ۸۹:۱۹-۳۷ and ۹۵:۹-۱۱. Only one of these eight passages is from the Psalms of David, Psalm ۱۵. Psalm ۴۶ is a Psalm of Korah. Psalm ۸۹ is of Ethan the Ezrahite. All of the rest but the last are Psalms of Asaph. Most of the speech of God is contained

.in the series of twelve, the Psalms of Asaph

The Psalms of Asaph are Psalms ۵۰ and ۷۳-۸۳. Since at least Psalms ۷۹ and ۸۰ appear to be later than the others, these Psalms are not in chronological order of composition. Their order relates to their symbolic place in the series of twelve. We have already seen how the names of the sons of Ishmael form a logical pattern of spiritual development. The series of twelve at some point began to show specific symbolic meanings for each numbered slot from one to twelve. This is full-blown in the Psalms .of Asaph

Psalm ۵۰ represents God in judgement, giving His words to the righteous and to the wicked. It introduces God as high and mighty. Psalm ۷۳ presents God as good. Psalm ۷۴ presents the most difficult situation, one in which it seems that God has forsaken and the righteous fall prey to enemy attacks. Psalm ۷۳ focuses on praise to God. Psalm ۷۶ returns to God's judgement with expressions such as breaking and cutting off. Psalm ۷۷ focuses on the word `remember', and emphasizes constancy in trusting in God. Psalm ۷۸ points to the law of God as finished and established. It makes a parable of the experience of Israel in their forgetting God and falling into disaster. God came .to their aid when they repented

Psalm ۷۹ is a prayer when the temple of God was invaded by the heathen. The petition is for revenge of the blood of martyrs and

sighing of the prisoner. Psalm ۸۰ is in a similar situation, but focuses on restoration of prosperity. It emphasizes trust in God. Psalm ۸۱ deals with the issue of idolatry. Psalm ۸۲ touches on justice for the poor and oppressed. It contains the mystical expressions .of entrance into union with God

Psalm ۸۳ speaks of a time when the heathen have taken control and the word of God is hidden in silence. Yet even this silence is a witness of the one true God. The Psalm contains the prayer that God will rise up and fill the earth with justice. Thus each slot in the series of twelve has its particular symbolism, and some of them are clearly .contrastive and easy to identify

The final series of twelve that we shall examine among the kings is the series of twelve disciples of Jesus. Jesus himself combined the roles of prophet and Imam. Still, his ministry focused heavily on the Imamate. This was the issue he particularly had to face as Judaism apostatized and left the earlier Biblical faith, substituting it with .rabbinical method

He should have emphasized the Imamate in any case, since he was the culmination of the Davidic line, to whom all of the messianic promises of David pointed. His twelve disciples were a symbolic series emphasizing his claims to be the divinely appointed leader and guide for humankind, the savior to whom the savior judges pointed, and the messiah king of whom the early kings were shadows, types and

.figures

We have now seen how the experience of occultation ultimately joins the Imamate in the ascension of Jesus. We have mentioned the extensive blossoming of the symbolism of twelve during this period. It remains to examine the Imami action as revealed in this period. We shall investigate the characteristics that were added to the .Imamate in the experiences of the Imami kings

The Imamate during the period of judges and even Moses was characterized by low loyalty. The authority of Moses was constantly questioned. This factor gave rise to the emphasis in the book of Numbers which affirms the Imamate time and again. The twelve judges inspired loyalty mainly in times of crisis. Otherwise, people tended to .'`do what was right in their own eyes

The kingly Imamate is different. David inspired a love and loyalty completely unknown to Moses. The books of Samuel and Chronicles are filled with stories of testimonials to David. His people loved him. His soldiers adored him and risked their lives, even to get him a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem. The concept of personal loyalty became so important that Jesus finally makes it the central issue. The Greek Scriptures seem even to set it above obedience. `Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, '.and thou shalt be saved

Before examining Imami features among the kings, let us recapitulate those features as they have arisen from the text. Among the patriarchs the Imamate appears in a series of twelve. The witness to the existence of the

one true God is its outstanding feature. Authoritative application of law to specific cases in evident. The authority to distinguish between clean and unclean and to give a verdict on taqiyya or concealment appears. The outstanding question resolved among the patriarchs is the question of the transmission of the Imamate. The factor .of moral capacity takes precedence over mechanical genealogical inheritance

The aspect of the Imam as a deliverer, rudimentary in the story of Noah, appears full-fledged with Moses and the judges. This period emphasizes the factor of divine ap… pointment and neglects genealogical preference completely. Rather than the mere .unity of God, the Imamate witnesses to the justice of God in a wide variety of ways

With the kings, a new area of emphasis appears. Without neglecting the sporadic aspect of deliverance, the kingly Imams take on a day-to-day role in governing. Their application of the law is constant. With the kings the series of twelves continues. With the kings the experience of occultation is finally joined to the Imamate in the ascension of Jesus. The kings establish an aspect of the Imamate which was weak and difficult to maintain under Moses and the judges, the aspect of personal loyalty. .Personal loyalty is the unique feature to look for among the kings

The first model of Imami loyalty appears in the life of David, who before receiving the Imamate himself, continued to give his loyalty to the preceding king. This king, Saul, was divinely appointed and anointed, but lost his kingdom through disobedience

to the command of God to kill the enemies of truth. The kingdom and Imamate were taken from him and given to David. What is fascinating is the degree of loyalty David showed Saul during the interim period, during the period between the time God told Saul he would lose the kingdom and the time he actually did. David's loyalty to Saul is .the greatest testimony for Imami loyalty

We have already noted how Imami loyalty characterizes the reign of David. This is in contrast to the experience of Moses, who hardly ever inspired true loyalty and had to resolve many a conflict arising because of its lack. David's loyalty to the `anointed of .the Lord' is especially in evidence in the following texts

In ۱ Samuel ۱۵, Saul disobeys the command of God and Samuel the prophet tells him that he will lose the kingdom. In ۱ Samuel ۱۶, Samuel anoints David. In ۱ Samuel ۱۷, David begins the deliverer aspect of his Imamate, which excites the jealousy of Saul. He tries to kill David several times. David's loyalty to Saul and faithfulness in the initiation of his Imami duties appear in ۱ Samuel ۱۸:۱۴۱۶. `David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him. Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved '.David, because he went out and came in before them

When the attempts on David's life failed, Saul tried to destroy him

through intrigue. He induced David to marry his daughter, although David tried hard to avoid it. This became prophetic of later attempts by usurper rulers to destroy .Imams through such marriages. Finally the daughter of Saul helps David escape

Time and time again David refuses to take Saul's life when the opportunity arises. Every time he explains this by saying that he will not touch the Lord's anointed. This attitude on the part of David is neither patience nor temerity. He is consciously affirming personal loyalty as a central issue of the Imamate. By so doing he in fact .establishes his own position

The lengths to which David went to establish the Imami loyalty, although they seem extreme, were in fact insufficient as history shows. The fall of the kingdom all but destroyed the Imamate. The Imamate as a part of the chain of establishing the will of God was supplanted by rabbinicism. Kingship at the time of Jesus was a purely political institution. That is why Jesus' claims ran afoul of Roman politics. Both those who accepted him and those who rejected him misunderstood the Imami implications of his mission. He told his listeners to `take up the cross' and follow. They had no inkling of what `following' meant. The same is true today. Christianity places the .emphasis on the cosmic sacrifice on the cross and forgets what it means to follow

Judaism erred in favor of the law, and thus drew the condemnation of Paul. Christianity has erred in favor of

sacrifice, and has thus drawn the condemnation of Islam. Where is the Bible message of Noah, Moses, David and Jesus, the call to follow the divine representative? We must look for it outside the Jewish and Christian establishments. We must find it .outside established Islam. Establishment itself is its negation

Our investigation of basics in the Biblical text has already suggested to us that by merely keeping the law we cannot please God. Knowledge of the law and perfect adherence to it cannot preserve one from formality, hypocrisy, pride and the egotistical attitude which attempts to buy God off. Paul is the most eloquent writer in the Bible on this wretched state of affairs. He says in Romans ۷:۱۸, `I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.' Paul's answer to the dilemma is quite simply attachment to Christ. He continues in Romans ۸:۱, `There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.' For Paul, loyalty to Jesus who appears as the Messiah and divine guide in the flesh is the `how to perform' which .humanity craves

It is quite a different thing to perform the injunctions of the law out of fear, pride or conformity to a group than to be so attached to the divinely appointed guide that every thought and act is subjected to love and loyalty to him. There is all

the difference between day and night. It is this difference that Paul so eloquently tries to get across. To perform one's prayers because of the letter of the commandment is of no avail. But to perform them out of love to the divine guide is entrance into true .life

The strange thing is that the difference may not be apparent. The outward actions may very well be the same. There is no way to judge another, no way in fact to judge oneself. That is why the constant return in love to the divine guide is essential. The confidence of Paul in this salvation, however, is finally reflected in his words, `I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creatures, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' .Romans ۸:۳۸-۳۹

Paul recognizes the basic practices of faith. Prayer: ۱ Timothy ۵:۱۷; Romans ۱۲:۱۲; ۱ Corinthians ۷:۵; Ephesians ۶:۱۸. Fasting: ۱ Corinthians ۷:۵; Acts ۱۴:۲۳. Alms: Acts ۲۴:۱۷. .Pilgrimage: Acts ۲۴:۱۷-۱۸

.Paul is clear on the basic principles of faith

There is only one God. `Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the (۱ Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the .circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith.' Romans ۳:۳۰

That one true God is perfectly just. `To declare, I (۲

say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which .believeth in Jesus.' Romans ۳:۲۶

۳) The knowledge of sin comes through the revealed Scriptures.`Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the .knowledge of sin.' Romans ۳:۲۰

۴) Recognizing that the verbal revelation is not enough to bring humankind in obedience to God, Paul preaches the message of a divine guide through faith in whom his hearers may find true life. `Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this .grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' Romans ۵:۱-۲

۵) That one true God shall judge the world. `In that day when God shall judge the .secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.' Romans ۲:۱۶

The main message of the New Testament is to establish Jesus Christ in the role of Imami leadership in the face of and in contrast to the growing and developing role of rabbinical method in Judaism in the first century AD. That is the import of Paul's proclamation of faith in Christ and his opposition to Jewish law or the rabbinical .method of establishing verdicts of right and wrong

۴. The Twelve Holy Imams

There are in fact recent Imami phenomena in Christian Protestantism. Two examples are found in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and a

Seventh-day Church of God group. The organization by a council of twelve reveals an awareness, however dim, of Biblical Imami principles. Sadly, the imposition of such an organization does not guarantee divine authority. It merely imitates it. We must find the true continuity of Biblical Imami authority within a few centuries after Jesus. A gap .of nearly two thousand years is not acceptable

Muhammad appeared as a prophet of God at the right time. As did all prophets, he condemned idolatry and polytheism. His mission in terms of the Imamate was timely. First of all, he warned the Jews for their rejection of the claims of Jesus. He condemned them for rejecting the Imamate. Secondly, and this was the most timely .of all, he attacked the Christian corruption of the Imamate

Although the Imamate was already misunderstood by many Christians in the first century, the replacement of the Imamate by the doctrine of the trinity and Episcopal authority did not become complete until shortly before the coming of Muhammad. Muhammad condemned the Christians' paradoxical rejection of Jesus' Imami role and .their raising him to the status of God

When Muhammad appointed his cousin and son-in-law Ali ibn Abi Taleb as his Imami successor, he inaugurated a line of twelve authoritative figures. All of these claimed Imami authority. It is our purpose at this point to summarize the Biblical aspects of the .Imamate which are reproduced among these twelve divine proofs

The following characteristics arise from the Bible account. The Imam is first of all

a witness to the unity of God and its clearest exponent. He applies the law of God authoritatively to situations not clearly covered by the verbal revelation. Such situations include the difficult areas of purity but may extend to other applications of the law, even to the case of verdicts on concealment or taqiyya.

The factor of diplomacy is balanced by the factor of deliverance. At times the Imam is called upon to lead people out of oppression into freedom. The Imamate is related to series of twelve. The experience of occultation, at first only tenuously related to the Imamate, appears full-fledged in the Imami experience of Jesus. With David the necessity of continued and strong loyalty to the Imam appears. The Biblical Imamate is summed up as living proof of divine guidance.

An examination of the lives and teachings of the twelve holy Imams from Imam Ali to Muhammad al-Mahdi reveals a remarkable correspondence between the Bible teaching and the Imami fulfillment. The Bible carefully and consistently develops the theme which appears in the twelve holy Imams. The Bible asserts itself not only as the foundation for the Imamate, a grand source for the development of Imami principles, but as a prophetic witness of the final flowering of the institution in the descendants of Muhammad.

The prophetic character of the Bible Imamate appears vividly in the symbolism of the series of twelve. Each slot or position in the series has its own character. The first slot is obviously a commencement. The

second is conciliatory. The third is martyrdom. The fourth is praise. The fifth is clarity of distinction. The sixth is codification. The seventh is loyalty. The eighth is betrayal of promises from the world. The ninth to the twelfth progress from imprisonment and .secrets to occultation

The most easily identifiable of these are the third and fourth slots, martyrdom and praise. As we examine the Biblical series of twelve, we note that very often these two aspects occur at the expected points. The names of the sons of Ishmael are the normative point of departure. The name of the third son is `Adbeel', disciplined of .God, and the name of the fourth is `Mibsam', fragrance

These two names give a rough equivalent to the third and fourth slots we have already seen. Levi and Judah are the third and fourth sons of Jacob. Levi with his brother Simeon took part in the slaughter of the Shechemites and was therefore scattered in Israel. His descendants became the priests, those who engaged in sacrifice. The figure of Levi eminently represents martyrdom in sacrifice. The name .'Judah' means praise

The names of the third and fourth judges are Shamgar and Deborah. The only thing we know about Shamgar is that he slew six hundred Philistines with an ox-goad (judges ۳:۳۱). His one act fits perfectly into the slot of martyrdom and sacrifice. The story of Deborah in the book of judges is the only one to contain a hymn of praise to .(God (judges ۵

The

third and fourth good kings are Rehoboam and Abijah. Although these two are not actually called good, since they permitted evil things in the kingdom, still they opposed the idolatry of Jeroboam and remained faithful to God. Rehoboam is the one who lost the kingdom of Israel, thus representing martyrdom and sacrifice. His loss of the temple treasure to Shishak the Pharaoh is also representative. Abijah's war experience with Israel contrasts with Rehoboam and represents the power of praise. He was victorious over Israel without the use of arms. The priests blew trumpets and the people shouted, and God worked for them without their engaging in battle. (۲ .(Chronicles ۱۳:۱۴۱۵

The third and fourth in the series of minor prophets are Amos and Obadiah. All of the prophets in this series are similar in predicting woe and judgements and finally restoration. It is thus difficult to place them in characteristic slots without doing .violence to their true character

Psalms ۷۴ and ۷۵ are the third and fourth of the twelve Psalms of Asaph. Psalm ۷۴ begins with the words `O God, why hast thou cast us off forever?' It is like a study of the Karbala massacre itself and is one of the most clearly prophetic passages of the Bible. Psalm ۷۵ begins with the words `Unto thee, O God, do we give thanks'. A comparison with the supplications of Imam Zainul Abideen shows a remarkable similarity between the themes of this Psalm and the Imam's work. As such, this Psalm also

.forms a remarkable prophecy of the coming fourth Imam

The clearest prophetic expressions of the Imamate in the Bible are thus truly the names of the sons of Ishmael and the twelve Psalms of Asaph, which fit all twelve .slots perfectly

The twelve apostles of Jesus are slightly problematic. They are not a series of twelve successive figures, and as such are more like the sons of Ishmael and Jacob than like the judges or kings. Nor do they clearly fit into the slots of twelve. The Gospel of John .gives Peter and Philip the third and fourth place chronologically

The martyrdom of Peter is striking, but the martyrdom of James takes precedence in being the first. Nor does the theme of praise necessarily attach itself to Philip. The apostles of Jesus, like the minor prophets, are relevant to the Imamate mainly because they appear as twelve. They do not have an Imami role of their own, although they are among the greatest witnesses to the Imamate. They are the ones .'who answer and affirm Jesus' Imami call ` Follow me

The actual Imamate seems to have been conferred on James by Jesus, for we find James taking a leadership role in the church at Jerusalem after the occultation of Jesus. The successors of James fled from Jerusalem into Arabia in AD ۷۰ where they kept the faith in obscurity until the coming of the prophet Muhammad. There may well have been twelve of them in all over this period of a little over

five hundred years. From the Imamate of James beginning in AD ٣١ to the birth of Muhammad in AD ٥٧٠ is ٥٣٩ years. An average of about forty-four years is not at all unrealistic for this quiet period. But we do not know their names. We only have the prophecy that when faith is gone from Israel, a remnant shall always exist in Kedar .((Isaiah ٢١:١۶-١٧; ۴٢:١١-١٢

In sum, the principle of the Imamate is a central issue of the Bible. From beginning to end there have been authoritative figures which the text assumes to have been sent from God. Love, loyalty and obedience are seen in the text to be their due. The second point of our list of Islamic distinctions is amply illustrated from the Bible. Only the Islamic doctrine of Imami infallibility is left somewhat undeveloped before the emergence of Jesus as a God-sent figure. As a whole, divinely appointed leadership as it appears in the Bible corresponds amazingly closely to the Islamic Imamate. No .institution in established Christianity so closely parallels it

Purity

Islamic purity practices are described in some detail in Tabataba'i pages ٢٢٨ff. Ali (١٩٨٨:١٠٩a, ١١٠a) defines the matter in precisely the same way. The ablutions of Islam are of three basic types: dry ablutions under special circumstances, ablution of head, .hands and feet, and finally washing of the entire body

States of purity and impurity are defined in terms of contact with defiling substances, such as urine, faeces, unclean animals, menstrual blood, semen, and

dead bodies. Ablutions after defilement are required before engaging in acts of .worship

The only remnant of purity regulations to be found in established Christianity is baptism and in a very limited degree the washing of feet. The distinction between pure and impure has disappeared. The acts requiring a state of purity in Islam, such as prayer in prostration and reading the sacred text as an act of worship, are also .more or less non-existent in Christianity

The concept of purity in Islam is attached to three more features besides ablutions. These are circumcision, avoidance of unclean meat in the diet, and the giving of alms .in charity, which is known as zakat or purification

The question now facing us is whether or not the Bible reflects the distinction between pure and impure as found in Islam and in Judaism as well for that matter. Furthermore, does the Bible recognize ablutions in principle before certain acts of worship? Finally, if so, are those acts of worship and methods of ablution similar to ?those in Islam

It follows also to note whether or not the practice of circumcision is justifiable on the basis of the Bible, and whether avoidance of certain meats is maintained, and if so, whether they are the same ones forbidden in Islam. The giving of alms in charity might be mentioned also, but it is a feature of Islamic purity which is found in some form in both Judaism and Christianity as well. Since it is less distinctive, it

will not interest us greatly here, except to note that the Bible certainly does enjoin .charity

There is a little note in John ۲:۶ which sheds light on purity. `And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.' Now Jesus quarreled with the people of his time about ablutions. He strictly avoided ablution before eating and did not permit his disciples to .engage in it

The quarrel is described in Mark ۷:۲-۳. `And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashed, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the .(tradition of the elders.' (See also Matthew ۱۵:۲ and Luke ۱۱:۳۸

Having divine authority, Jesus did not follow the tradition of the elders. He had authority to render a verdict on the law himself. It is a mere fact that the washing of .hands with the invocations involved does not appear in the law

The quarrel was apparently so involved that some of the disciples of Jesus in fact did not understand the principles of his interpretation. Even at the end of his ministry the issue was unclear. Peter demands an ablution before the meal in John ۱۳:۹. `Lord, not '.my feet only, but also my hands and my head

It is as though Peter had got the impression that the practice of Jesus was stricter than that

of the Pharisees, and in addition to hands, the feet and head should also be purified before eating. The fact was that Jesus opposed ablution of any kind before eating, .because it was not justifiable by the Torah

The washing of feet was an exemplary act in hospitality (cf. Genesis ۱۸:۴; ۱۹:۲; ۲۴:۳۲; ۴۳:۲۴; Judges ۱۹:۲۱; ۱ Samuel ۲۵:۴۱ and ۱ Timothy ۵:۱۰), not an act of ablution. Peter did not apparently realize this. His outburst, however, gives us the one clear reference in .the New Testament to ablution of head, hands and feet

Jesus did not oppose ablution that was justifiable on the basis of the Torah. Specifically the entire body ablution, called baptism in the New Testament, is often mentioned. Other forms of ablution are ignored since there was no argument about them. The text deals only with forms of ablution that went beyond the injunctions of the law. Ablution before the performing of acts of worship remains valid in the .practice of Jesus

Since the practice of ablution is not described in the New Testament, even in the case of full-body ablution or baptism, we are constrained to rely on the text of the so called Old Testament for details of its execution. Even there, the details are scarce. The description of ritual acts is notoriously deficient in religious texts, in the Qur'an even more than in the Bible, since they are practices that are transmitted more by the .example of the prophets than verbal precept

Nevertheless a number of

descriptions exist. The Torah describes ablutions for the priests and for others on certain occasions of ritual defilement, such as contact with the dead and sexual .activity

Exodus ۲۹:۴. `And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water.' See also Exodus ۴۰:۱۲, Leviticus .۸:۶

Exodus ۳۰:۱۸-۲۱. 'Thou shalt also make a laver of brass, and his foot also of brass, to wash withal: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein. For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the Lord: So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him .and to his seed throughout their generations.' See also Exodus ۳۰:۳۰-۳۲

Leviticus ۱۴:۹. `But it shall be on the seventh day, that he shall shave all his hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair he shall shave off. and he shall wash his clothes, also he shall wash his flesh in water, and he shall be clean.' See also .Leviticus ۱۵:۵-۱۱,۱۳,۱۶,۱۷,۲۱, ۲۲,۲۷

Numbers ۱۹:۷-۸. `Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall

bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and the priest shall be unclean until the even. And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the even.' See also .verses ۱۸-۱۹

Deuteronomy ۲۳:۱۱. `But it shall be, when evening cometh on, he shall wash himself '.with water; and when the sun is down, he shall come into the camp again

The prophets note some instances of ablution, in some cases showing slight .differences in the details from those depicted in the Torah

Kings ۵:۱۰,۱۴. `And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan ۲ seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean... Then he went down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was '.clean

Chronicles ۴:۶. `He made also ten lavers, and put five on the right hand, and five on ۲ the left, to wash in them: such things as they offered for the burnt offering they '.washed in them; but the sea was for the priests to wash in

The Psalms make some references to the ablutions that have preceded the prayer .occasion. These give innocence as the spiritual counterpart of ablution

Psalm ۱۸:۲۰,۲۴,۲۶. `The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands

hath he recompensed me... according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight... '.With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure

Psalm ۲۴:۳-۴. `Who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure '.heart

'.Psalm ۲۶:۶. `I will wash my hands in innocence: so will I compass thine altar, O Lord

Psalm ۷۳:۱۳. `Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in '.innocence

Isaiah and Jeremiah concentrate on the problem of hypocrisy, or the attitude that as long as the formal aspect of ablution is maintained, moral behavior can be discounted. These prophets show clearly that formal ablution is of no value if it is not followed by .the behavior it implies

Isaiah ۱:۱۶. `Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before '.mine eyes; cease to do evil

Jeremiah ۲:۲۲. `For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet '.thine iniquity is marked before me, said the Lord God

The New Testament texts show that the practice of ablution was continued by the .followers of Jesus Christ

Acts ۹:۳۷. `And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when '.they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber

Hebrews ۱۰:۲۲. `Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.' .The author is not referring here to hygienic practices, necessary though they may be

He is talking about ritual purity through ablutions and its spiritual, moral and ethical .counterpart

It can be concluded that the concept of ritually pure and impure is found throughout the Bible. Although there may be some minor variation in its details, ablution is main… tained throughout in the form of total immersion or washing on one hand, and the washing of the extremities on the other. Ablution is a formal sign of the inward .decision to put away evil actions

The concept of purity and impurity in the Bible is not limited to ablution alone. When there was a disagreement among the followers of Jesus about the practice of the law, it was specifically the matter of purity that was maintained and agreed upon for all people. Acts ۱۵:۲۰. `But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of '.idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood

This text clearly enjoins the purity code in diet that is found in Leviticus eleven and Deuteronomy fourteen. This means that purity requires that slaughtering take place in such a way that the name of God alone and that of no idol is pronounced, that the blood is removed, and that only specific animals are appropriate to be eaten. All three .of these factors are, according to Acts ۱۵, essential

In the clear light of this text it remains puzzling that Christianity ignores the most basic injunctions regarding purity. To take texts regarding the washing of hands (Matthew ۱۵:۱۰-۲۰) or the association

with Gentiles (Acts ۱۰:۹-۲۸) and apply them to the matter of dietary purity is unjustifiable. To interpret the Pauline statements (for example the discussion of vegetarianism in Romans ۱۴:۲-۳) so as to grant permission to eat ritual impurities is only to construe Paul at variance with the rest of the Bible. The conclusion of such interpretation is the discrediting of Paul, not the permission to eat impurities.

The Jewish practice of kosher, on the basis of Exodus ۲۳:۱۹, forbids the mixing of milk and meat, taking the precaution of keeping separate cooking and eating vessels. The Torah text forbids seething the meat of a kid in its mother's milk. The Jewish practice in fact comes, according to some scholars, from ancient Canaanite practice and not from the Torah at all.

In Genesis ۱۸:۸ Abraham mixes milk and meat products. Jews might say that the laws of purity were revealed only at the time of Moses, but that is belied by the fact that they were already known at the time of Noah (see Genesis ۶-۹). How could Noah take a different number of clean and unclean animals into the ark unless it was already clear to him which were clean and which unclean? The Bible thus describes a purity code which in some aspects is closer to that of Islam than it is to that of Judaism.

Ali does not give a specific and comprehensive list of forbidden meats. Tabataba'i does so on page ۲۴۹. Slaughtering must be done facing towards Mecca,

.pronouncing the name of Allah, and letting out the blood

A comparison with Acts ۱۵:۲۰, Deuteronomy fourteen and Leviticus eleven shows that the Bible and Islamic practice are almost identical. The slaughtering practice is described in the same terms. The list of forbidden species is the same with the exception of the camel and zebra, which are, according to Tabataba'i, permitted in .Islam and forbidden in the Bible

The camel, but not the zebra, is actually specified in the Qur'an as edible. There may be scholars who prohibit the zebra. A small difference is in the categorization. The forbidden species in the Torah are called shekets, abomination, which may correspond to the Islamic term makruh. Some of the forbidden meats in Islam are called by the stronger term, haram. The prohibition in Islam is thus couched in .stronger terms than in the Bible

Two other practices of purity are described in the Bible. The practice called `circumcision' in English is called `purification' in some other languages. According to the Bible, this practice was either instituted or reinstituted at the time of Abraham (Genesis seventeen). It can hardly be overemphasized that the true faith of the Bible is specifically the faith of Abraham, since all of the Biblical prophets are purported to be either forefathers or descendants of Abraham. The practice of circumcision of .male infants is not questioned at all in the Bible in any text

There was a disagreement among Jews concerning the circumcision of adult converts to the faith, apparently between

Hellenismg Jews mainly from Alexandria and others during the decades immediately preceding and following the time of Jesus Christ. Since circumcision, like ablution, was an outward sign of an inward preparation, it was thought that the inward preparation .sufficed

.This argument carried over among the followers of Christ

Paul took the position that adult converts to the faith need not be circumcised, in fact, should not be circumcised merely to satisfy the demands of the other party. The authoritative church in Jerusalem with James at its head agreed with him, while certain Pharisees did not (Acts ۱۵:۵,۱۹-۲۰). The discussion does not apply to the matter of circumcising infants. This was never questioned. It was only a matter of choosing to be or not to be circumcised oneself, at an age when that choice was possible. All of .Paul's strong words against circumcision refer to this situation alone

Interestingly enough, however, Paul's argument that circumcision is superfluous since Abraham was accepted before he was circumcised could be turned around to support the other argument. After all, he was circumcised even though he was accepted, and that even at the age of ninety. Despite Paul's forbidding circumcision to the adult converts in Galatia, he himself circumcised Timothy. Obviously Paul forbade the Galatians from circumcision because they construed it in such a way as to weaken their faith in Christ. There is not one word in the Bible to suggest that male children of .believers should not be circumcised

Since the subject of circumcision is

becoming an increasingly polemic one, it appears necessary to examine the Biblical texts in more detail. The basic legal texts will be observed first and then the New Testament ones, especially as they relate to the Pauline situation, which is the basis .for most Christian practice

The institution of circumcision is found throughout the seventeenth chapter of Genesis. This happened when Abraham was ninety-nine years old (Genesis ۱۷:۱). Cir... cumcision is dealt with in regard to the command to obey God perfectly and enter into covenant with Him (۱۷:۱-۲). It is not set forth for the Jews alone, but for the many nations of which Abraham is to become father (Genesis ۱۷:۴-۶). It is a part of the .(promise that Abraham's descendants will inherit the land of Palestine (۱۷:۷-۸

Circumcision is performed on males alone, not on females (۱۷:۱۰). Circumcision consists of cutting off the foreskin (۱۷:۱۱). It should normally take place on the eighth day after birth, that is, on the same day of the following week (۱۷:۱۲). It should be performed on every male one has access to (۱۷:۱۲-۱۳). Failure to be circumcised constitutes a breaking of covenant with God (۱۷:۱۴). The rest of the chapter describes Abraham's performance of circumcision at the age of ninety-nine when his son .Ishmael was thirteen

Abraham circumcised Isaac as an infant in Genesis ۲۱:۴. `And Abraham circumcised '.his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him

Later legislation is limited to only a few Mosaic passages. Exodus ۱۲:۴۴,۴۸. `But every man's servant

that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof... And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.' This text adds to the Abrahamic covenant only that circumcision is an absolute .prerequisite for participation in the observance of Passover

The general legislation is repeated in Leviticus ۱۲:۳. `And in the eighth day the flesh of '.his foreskin shall be circumcised

Circumcision is used metaphorically to indicate willingness to obey God from the heart. Such symbolism begins already in the Mosaic text, Deuteronomy ۱۰:۱۶. `Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff necked.' Deuteronomy ۳۰:۶ expands on the metaphorical use. `And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all '.thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live

Genesis thirty-four reports the circumcision of the Shechemites by the sons of Jacob. This story is interesting, since it appears to make circumcision the only requirement of conversion. Exodus ۴:۲۶ mentions the circumcision of Moses' son. Joshua five reports .the circumcision before entering the promised land

The only other remarks of the prophets are those of Jeremiah. First is Jeremiah ۴:۴ in which he echoes the metaphorical usage in

Deuteronomy. In Jeremiah ۹:۲۵ the valuelessness of circumcision without obedience is maintained. `Behold, the days come, said the Lord, that I will punish all them which '.are circumcised with the uncircumcised

This is the whole legal and early Imami basis on which the later discussion of .circumcision rests

Circumcision is also mentioned a few times in the gospels. Luke mentions the circumcision of both John and Jesus in Luke ۱:۵۹ and ۲:۲۱. The only report of Jesus speaking of circumcision is in John ۷:۲۲-۲۳. `Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the Sabbath day circumcise a man. If a man on the Sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man '?every whit whole on the Sabbath day

This teaching does not directly relate to circumcision, but to the justification of Jesus' act of healing on the Sabbath in the eyes of the Pharisees. When Jesus was accused of breaking the Sabbath by healing, he gave this argument. The verdict of the Pharisees was that a Sabbath born child should be circumcised on the following Sabbath, and this did not constitute Sabbath-breaking, since it was commanded in the .law. Jesus does not comment on the validity of the Pharisaical verdict

Stephen, in his sermon in Acts ۷:۸, reports the covenant of circumcision with Abraham in a positive sense. `And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and

so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; '.and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs

The problem with circumcision arises for the first time in Acts ۱۰:۴۴-۴۷. `While Peter yet speak these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy '?Ghost as well as we

This text is full of special concepts and assumptions. The first is the use of the term `the circumcision' for a certain group of people. The larger set is the whole of those under the law of Moses. The subset within the circumcision is those `which believed' in Jesus Christ. Through the preaching of Peter and a divine act, we are brought face to face with a new group, those who believe in Jesus Christ, but are not `of the circumcision'. This new group is characterized by belief in Christ, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and baptism by water. They are not circumcised, and it remains somewhat .unclear what their relationship to the law of Moses is

The question cannot be delayed beyond Acts ۱۵:۱. `And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except

ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.' Acts ۱۵:۵ `But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was '.needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses

The question is not resolved by appeal to rabbinical method, but by appeal to Imami authority in the figure of James, who is either the Imam in his own right succeeding Jesus, or his representative. Acts ۱۵:۱۳. James begins his verdict by making prophetic reference to the Davidic authority passed on through Jesus. Acts ۱۵:۱۶-۱۷. At the same time he extends this authority to the Gentiles. In verse ۱۹ he turns to the verdict at hand. `Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the .synagogues every Sabbath day.' Acts ۱۵:۱۹-۲۱

Verse nineteen clearly implies that converts among the Gentiles should not be constrained to be circumcised. But verse twenty adds details which cloud a clear verdict. If the converts are not required to be circumcised, they are still required to adhere to certain forms. It is impossible that the practices mentioned are exhaustive, since fornication is mentioned but not adultery, eating meat offered to idols is ,forbidden

.but not idol-worship itself

Nor is it clear that James is referring to the covenant of Noah for the Gentile converts, rather than the covenant through Abraham or Moses. If James were implying the covenant of Noah to be valid, he should have mentioned the practices specific to that covenant. In fact he does refer to the specifics of that covenant in regard to diet, but he overlooks blood revenge, and adds to it fornication. He is not therefore referring to .the covenant of Noah

The problem is resolved when we remember the character of Imami verdicts. James has no incentive to interpret the law in general. He is dealing with a specific case. He is acting as Imam at a particular time in regard to a particular problem. He therefore speaks to the practical issues present. He knows what issues are specifically at stake with the particular Gentile converts in question. They are liable to commit fornication, but not adultery. They are liable to eat meat offered to idols, but not worship idols. They are liable to eat things forbidden by the law, and must be reminded specifically of those. These people are liable to think that the Imami verdict allowing them as adult converts to remain uncircumcised permits their ignoring the law on other points, specifically in diet. James thus warns them of this danger. In so doing, he limits the verdict to the matter of the releasing of the Gentile converts in question from the .obligation of circumcision

Having established

the Imami verdict and limited it to the matter of releasing from the obligation of circumcision in a particular case, James goes on to speak about the reading of the law in verse twenty-one. The clear implication is that James expects the uncircumcised Gentile converts to listen to the reading of the law in the synagogues every Sabbath. The Christian who appeals to the verdict of James for the neglect of circumcision in later times must also follow the verdict of James and attend the Sabbath reading of .the law in the synagogue. One cannot take the one without the other

There are two points in regard to this situation that must be made. The first is that the question of circumcising adult converts to the law of Moses was one widely debated, especially among Hellenistic Jews. The period was one of missionary endeavor, and there were many cases of conversion to Judaism. The problem was very real and .practical

The second point is that Paul was present at the giving of James's verdict and appears to support it, since he was part of the delegation which took the verdict to the Gentiles in question, the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (Acts ۱۵:۲۳). If we must add attending the Sabbath reading of the law in the synagogue to release from the obligation of circumcision in James's verdict, we must also add the avoidance of eating meat offered to idols. Paul does not appear to take this verdict of James as of

universal significance. He admits its validity for the specific case at hand, but he does .not admit its general validity

Paul in principle allows eating meat offered to idols in ١ Corinthians ٨. His argument is of great interest. He bases it on the unity of God. Since God is one and there are no other gods besides Him, idols are empty, having power only in the mind of the .ignorant. Therefore, it is not significant whether meat has been offered to idols or not

Sensitivity to meat offered to idols is the result of a weak conscience. One should therefore avoid eating meat offered to idols simply out of deference to those who have a weak conscience and might be emboldened to sin against themselves by our example. Paul thus rejects the universal value of James's verdict, accepting it only in the specific conflict among the Gentile converts in Syria, Antioch and Cilicia at that time. Once the Imami verdict releasing the obligation of any legal practice under specific circumstances is abandoned, the general recourse must be the written .legislation. Paul therefore puts himself face to face with the law

Paul's discussion of circumcision is therefore outside the pale of James's release of the obligation on Gentile converts at the time. His discussion takes place strictly within the context of the law, and possibly within the context of Imami verdicts of which we .have no record

The first Pauline text is Romans ٢:٢٥-٢٩. `For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but

if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keeps the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfill the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.'

Here Paul notes three potential groups: those who are circumcised and keep the law, those who are circumcised and who do not keep the law otherwise, and those who are not circumcised and keep the law otherwise. He condemns the second group and condones the third. His argument is that circumcision is valid only when the law is otherwise observed, and that observing the law otherwise places the individual in the same situation as the circumcised law keeper.

This concept is a logical reversal of the text noted above in Jeremiah ۹:۲۵, where God's punishment falls equally on the circumcised and uncircumcised. Such a reversal, however, that God's reward falls equally on the circumcised and uncircumcised, conflicts with Genesis ۱۷:۱۴. Paul is led into the argument by the very real and practical situation of circumcision being a form imposed in infancy which

.does not necessarily conform to later individual choices

Paul continues the discussion in Romans ۳:۱-۲. `What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.' Paul recognizes the value of circumcision as a part of the configuration necessary for the guarding and transmitting of Scripture. He sees it to be a historically and socially important factor rather than a personal one. He thus interprets the legislation as referring to the creation of a people who would preserve revelation. He implies that to apply this to the individual faith .experience is to skew the meaning and role of circumcision

In Romans ۴:۹-۱۲, Paul continues his thought. `Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in .circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet '.uncircumcised

Here Paul points out that circumcision is not the condition

for receiving pardon for sin (cf. Romans ۴:۷-۸). The condition for receiving pardon is faith in any case. Paul continues to maintain the non-salvific role of circumcision as seen in chapter three, but he does place an added burden on its meaning as a `seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised'. By making cir... cumcision a `seal' of such righteousness, Paul apparently tries to use it psychologically to avert the hypocrisy which he condemned in chapter two. Although Paul thus rejects any salvific role of circumcision, he gives it more than a symbolic role. It is part of the process of preserving Scriptural revelation, and it is a physical badge which should stimulate the individual to exercise the kind of faith Paul does see .as salvific

In ۱ Corinthians ۷:۱۸-۱۹ Paul makes the same point more briefly. `Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but '.the keeping of the commandments of God

Here Paul succinctly notes several things. He places the discussion clearly in the area of conversion of adult males to faith in Christ. He notes that such a situation should not have any effect on circumcision. He respects the same dichotomy that James had between circumcision and keeping the law in other matters. For the convert, circum... .cision is not obligatory, but keeping the commandments otherwise is

Paul engages in a polemic discussion of circumcision without

adding anything essential to his arguments in Galatians ۲:۳,۷-۹,۱۲; ۵:۲-۳,۶,۱۱; ۶:۱۲-۱۳,۱۵. Chapter two refers to the confrontations between Paul and others and does not directly deal with the practice of circumcision itself. Chapter five is even more polemic, using strong language against the circumcised. `Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law... For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.' .The only thing Paul adds to his thought here is heat

Paul's heated conclusion in Galatians ۶:۱۲-۱۳ is clearly in keeping with his rational arguments in Romans. `For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the '.law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh

The words are used in Ephesians ۲:۱۱ and Philippians ۳:۳-۵. It appears that in the latter Paul more clearly takes a Deuteronomic position on heart circumcision. `For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.' It has become increasingly clear that the circumcision of adult converts is associated with a rabbinical concept of legal interpretation as a way of personal salvation. Paul is the champion of the Imami alternative, that faith in Jesus Christ as the divinely appointed leader is essential to personal salvation. Paul shows an awareness from the beginning that

the purpose of circumcision as originally legislated is not a way of personal salvation, .and to use it as such is to skew its meaning

These concepts of heart circumcision by faith in Christ come out strongly in Colossians ٢:١١. `In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.' Paul sees the Imami loyalty to Christ as the means whereby God performs the Deuteronomic circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy ٣٠:۶). Unity of all in Christ is brought out without regard to circumcision in Colossians ٣:١١. In Colossians ۴:١١ and Titus ١:١٠ the .word circumcision refers to the Jewish believers without adding to the discussion

In sum, it appears that circumcision was taken out of its context to be a necessary act of adult converts in order to attain personal salvation. As such, it was strenuously attacked by Paul, who saw it in its role as a part of the process of preserving Scriptural revelation through a particular people partly identified by circumcision. He did grant it more than symbolic meaning in the personal experience, however, as long as it did not threaten the Imami status of Jesus as opposed to rabbinical method. For him, circumcision of adult converts began to take on symbolic meaning as reliance on rabbinical interpretation in the place of Christ's authority. In that context, he became .bitterly opposed to circumcision of adult converts

Paul's discussion of circumcision strenuously affirms obedience

to the commandments among those who have accepted Christ as the divinely appointed representative of God. He does not even mention the practice of circumcis… ing infants. He only touches the problem of requiring adult converts to be circumcised. His affirmation of obedience to the law implies the continued practice of circumcising .infants in conformity to the example of Jesus

The Christian aversion to keeping the law is largely a result of misunderstanding Paul's concept of Christ. The Christian idea of distinguishing between faith and acts of obedience to the law is a result of Greek and Gnostic distinction between spirit and matter. Paul's distinction is between keeping the law according to rabbinical authority and interpretation, and between recognizing the claims of Christ and obeying the law through love and loyalty to him. The conflict is between loyalty to Jesus and loyalty to .rabbinicism in the first century AD

It is conceivable that submission to rabbinical authority and submission to the lordship of Christ could theoretically result in precisely the same actions. The difference is not in conformity or nonconformity to the law of Moses, but in the motivation. Paul does not have authority to do away with the law of Moses. He can only point out who has .God-given authority to interpret and implement it

Finally, the legislation of circumcision, as Jesus according to John points out, is not based on Mosaic legislation but on the Abrahamic covenant, a covenant made in view .(of all the families of the earth (Genesis ١٢:١-٣

,In sum

the four purity practices of Islam, circumcision, a ritually pure diet, alms in charity, and ablution of the whole body or the extremities, are all described in the Bible in ways almost identical to Islamic expression and practice. The details of ablution show some diversity even within the Biblical text itself, but do not conflict in any way with Islamic practice. Despite the established Christian interpretation of the Pauline texts to be against purity codes, it is still possible to make a strong, Biblically comprehensive, and consistent case in favor of the purity codes of circumcision, diet, and ablution. It will be a matter of opinion whether the case against purity is strong and consistent. It is certainly not Biblically comprehensive, since it depends almost entirely on Paul alone, a man who according to the Christian Scriptures, never even met Jesus in person. On the other hand, as we have shown, Paul can be understood consistently to favor .purity as well

Prayer

Both Tabataba'i (۲۳۷-۲۴۴) and Ali (۱۹۸۸:۱۱۰a-۱۱۷a) give detailed description of Islamic prayer or salaat. They are agreed on the principles and details. There are five compul… sory prayers in the day, arranged on three occasions: one prayer in the early morning .before dawn, two in the afternoon, and two in the evening

The prayers are made up of units or rak'aat. Each prayer must be started with a silent intention of laying that particular prayer. The prayer is preceded by the adhan or call to prayer if public, the Iqamat

to establish the prayer, and theTakbiratul Ehram or raising the hands beside the head and saying `Allahu akbar', that is, `God is great'. These are all done standing, facing .the holy city of Mecca

One unit of prayer consists of the following a standing recitation of the first chapter of the Qur'an and one other chapter, a bowing while saying the glorification of God, and two prostrations while saying glorifications. The second unit of the prayer includes personal supplications while standing, and the second and final units contain the .tashahud or witness while kneeling and sitting back on the heels

The prayer is concluded by salutations of peace. Finally the prayer ends with three repetitions of `Allahu akbar'while seated, that is, kneeling and sitting back on the heels. Personal supplications may follow the prayer while kneeling. All supplications are made with the hands outstretched, palms up. Prostration is made upon earth directly or upon a portable piece of earth, clay, stone or other non-wearable earth substance. The early morning prayer contains two units, both afternoon prayers .contain four units, and the evening prayers contain three and four units each

In his exposition of the pillars of practice in Matthew six, Jesus does not really give details on how to pray. That was already known to his listeners. What they needed to learn was not to be hypocritical about it. Unfortunately today most of us do not even know how to pray. It is certainly true that one can lift up one's soul to

God in any circumstances and at any time. But the Bible also gives some indications of appropriate times and ways of praying, and the informal lifting up of the soul to God, .important as it is, does not replace these

In Daniel ۶:۱۰ there are some indications of how to arrange formal prayer in time of crisis. It is the bare minimum of formal prayer. After all, the man's life was threatened. He was not going to pray in ways that he did not know to be essential for fear of losing his life. `Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did '.aforetime

There is a good deal of information in this text. We find out that Daniel had a regular way of praying, that is, the same way every day. He had a place in his home for prayer. He turned in a specific direction, that is toward the temple site in Jerusalem. He prayed in a certain posture which included kneeling. He carried out this formal prayer at set times during the day, three to be exact. Finally, he considered this matter of formal prayer to be so important that he risked his life to carry it out .precisely, instead of leaving it off for a mere thirty days

More formal aspects of prayer can

be gained from the story already mentioned about Naaman. We have already seen his purification in the Jordan river. The story continues in ۲ Kings ۵:۱۷-۱۸. `And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord. In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.'

Few people stop to question why Naaman needed two mules' burden of earth. The context makes this quite clear. He promised not to worship any god but the Lord. The ancient concept was that gods changed from place to place. There may have been a lingering thought in this man's mind that God was somehow attached to the soil of Palestine. On the other hand, considering the reference he makes to bowing, it appears that he realizes that he should bow in prayer upon earth. When he put his forehead down in prayer, it should touch earth. So he asks for earth from the place of the prophet upon which to bow in prayer. This is one more factor to add to those already discovered for Daniel.

What are the Biblical times of prayer?

Psalm ۵۵:۱۷ `Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.' Here the beginning parameters for the times of prayer are set forth. As soon as it can be with certainty called evening, then one time of prayer begins. Then, as soon as the night begins to break and the coming of light can be discerned, then begins another time of prayer. Finally, when noon has arrived with certainty, that .is, when the sun has clearly crossed the zenith, there begins another time of prayer

Several prayers can be situated within these times. Psalm ۱۱۹:۱۶۴ says: `Seven times a day do I praise thee, because of thy righteous judgements.' The early morning prayer is mentioned in Psalms ۵:۳; ۶۵:۱; ۸۸:۱۳; and ۱۱۹:۱۴۷. Prayer at midnight is mentioned in .۱۱۹:۶۲

But the Bible is specific about the fact that there are precise times of prayer. Psalm ۳۲:۶ says: `For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found.' Also Psalm ۶۹:۱۳ says: `But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time.' It is obviously unacceptable, according to both Daniel and .David, to neglect the proper times of prayer

Besides the proper times for prayer there are also positions enjoined by the Bible. We have already noted the position of kneeling. The Hebrew word in fact refers to .kneeling on the knees while at the same time sitting on the heels

In

the case of Naaman prostration with the forehead on the earth was implied. This position of prayer is mentioned many times in the Bible. Some examples are Genesis ۱۷:۳. `And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him.' Joshua ۵:۱۴. `And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship.' Jesus Christ maintained this posture of prayer as well. Matthew ۲۶:۳۹. `And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed.'

Prostration appears commonly in the Psalms as well. Psalm ۴۴:۲۵. `For our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth.' Psalm ۹۵:۶. `O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker.' Here three positions are mentioned: worshipping or prostration, bowing and kneeling. Bowing appears in many connections. Psalm ۲۲:۲۹. `All they that go down to the dust shall bow before him.'

There is one more bodily position of formal prayer mentioned in Scripture. This is standing. Psalm ۴:۴. `Stand in awe, and sin not.'

Psalm ۲۶:۱۲. `My foot standeth in an even place: in the congregations will I bless the Lord.'

Prayer in congregation, that is as we have seen, standing, bowing, kneeling, and prostrating together, is enjoined in other passages as well. Psalm ۲۲:۲۲. `In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.' Psalm ۳۵:۱۸. `I will give thanks in the great congregation.'

Lifting up of hands palms out at the side of the head at some time during the prayer is

also enjoined. Psalm ۲۸:۲. `Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle.' Psalm ۶۳:۴. `Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.'

These verses also reveal that one should cry out the name of the Lord when lifting up the hands. The text of this cry is found in Psalm ۳۵:۲۷. `Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favor my righteous cause: yea, let them say continually, Let the Lord be magnified.' This Hebrew expression, Yigdal Adonaf, or `let the Lord be magnified', is `Allahu Akbar' in Arabic. This cry is enjoined in many verses: Psalms ۱۸:۵,۶; ۳۰:۸; ۳۴:۳; and ۵۵:۱۶.

Remembrance of the name of God is enjoined in many places. Psalm ۶:۵. `For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?' Psalm ۳۴:۱. `I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.' Psalm ۶۳:۶. `When I remember thee upon my bed.'

Remembrance of the name of God is also associated with stretching out the hands in front of oneself. Psalm ۸۸:۹. `Lord, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee.' Psalm ۴۴:۲۰,۲۱. `If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god: Shall not God search this out?'

From the prayer of Daniel we saw that a particular direction

of prayer is mandatory. The prophet prayed toward the temple site in Jerusalem. The ark was moved to Jerusalem by David, who conquered the city. Before that time the place of prayer was elsewhere. At the time of Jesus the place of prayer was still Jerusalem, but he prophesied that it would be changed. John ۴:۲۱. `Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, '.worship the Father

The direction of prayer is mentioned often in the Psalms. Psalm ۵:۷. `But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear will I worship .toward thy holy temple.' See also Psalms ۱۶:۸

The formal physical aspects of prayer can be summarized: standing, raising the hands to the sides of the head with palms out, crying `the Lord be magnified', bowing, kneeling, and prostrating, as well as making supplication with hands outstretched. There is a particular direction in which to turn. There are particular times to pray in the evening, morning and afternoon. All of these are Bible teachings and the ways in which the people of the Bible from earliest times down to the followers of Jesus Christ prayed. The fact that these practices have largely disappeared from among .Christians and Jews does not in any way diminish their Biblicality

Jesus gives some pointers in Matthew six on what to pray for. The list he gives is often called the Lord's Prayer, but we know that

this was not meant as a prayer text as such, since it is not standardized in the Gospels, but appears in variants. The Psalms were the prayer hymns of the ancient Israelites as well as the early Christians, and a comparison of the words of Islamic .prayer with Psalm portions will show them virtually identical

Here are the basic words of Islamic prayer, mostly from the first chapter of the Qur'an with Biblical references which show similar expressions. Allahu akbar! The Lord be magnified! (Ps.۳۵:۲۷; ۴۸:۱; ۱۴۷:۵). I begin in the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. (Ps.۱۴۸:۸). All praise is God's (Ps.۹:۱) Lord of the Worlds (Ps.۹۰:۲; ۱۰:۱۶). The Beneficent, the Merciful (Ps.۲۵:۶). The Master of the Day of Judgement (Ps.۵۰:۶). Thee alone do we worship, of Thee alone do we seek help (Ps.۳۰:۸). Guide us on the right path (Ps.۲۷:۱۱; ۲۵:۴). The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy bounties (Ps.۳۱:۱۹). Not the path of those on whom fell Thy wrath nor of those gone astray .((Ps.۲۸:۳). Glory to God in the highest and praise to Him! (Luke ۲:۱۴

Sacrifice is reaffirmed by the holy example of Noah in Genesis ۸:۲۰. The construction of an altar, that is, place of sacrifice and prayer appears here for the first time, as a .holy example

The question of whether prostration should be on earth substance alone or whether it may be on other material must begin with direct divine command. The only Bible text of that category which seems to

be of relevance is Exodus ۲۰:۲۴-۲۶ `An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. Neither shalt thou go up by steps '.unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon

The word `altar' in the original Hebrew text does not imply an edifice, but a place of sacrifice and prayer. The command is to provide a place of sacrifice of earth material, such as clay or stone as mentioned in verse twenty-five. If stone is used, it should not be cut with a tool, which constitutes pollution. Thus the motive of the command is to provide an unpolluted place of sacrifice and prayer. The command does not imply a command to sacrifice, rather, it merely recognizes sacrifice as a valid part of acts of worship. Prostration as such is only implied on the basis of general usage throughout .the Bible

The intent of prohibiting steps in Exodus ۲۰:۲۶ does not deal with steps as such, but with the danger of polluting the place of sacrifice and prayer. The content of the command is to protect the place from pollution. The command implies that contact with

excretions from the private parts pollutes the place of sacrifice and thus makes the .prayer invalid

The command states no particular size for the place of sacrifice and prayer. When the practice is prayer without the sacrifice of an animal, the earthen place of sacrifice can be made small and movable, so that care for pollution of it can be reduced. The command would thus mean that such an earth altar becomes potentially polluted if the private parts are uncovered above it. Such an earth altar must be purified or replaced as a precaution. Smallness of size and movability reduces the likelihood of .pollution

All of the other texts relating to prostration on earth are human witnesses. None of them claim to be the quoted words of God. We shall examine here those passages which mention specifically that the prostration is on earth. Other texts, which we shall not examine, mention prostration without specifying on what material prostration is .made. There is no mention of prostration on any other material but earth

The first mention of prostration on earth in the Bible is in Genesis ۲۴:۵۲. The story of the prayers of the servant of Abraham is revealing in a number of ways. The prayer tradition of Abraham is almost better described here than in the case of Abraham himself. The circumstances of this prostration to earth are remarkable. When the servant heard Laban and Bethuel agree to the marriage of Rebecca, he worshipped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth. The same

practice of doing prostration to God upon hearing remarkable news will be seen in a .later text as well

In Genesis ۴۲:۶, there is another use for prostration to the earth. Joseph's brothers prostrate before him as governor of Egypt. This is the first example of prostration before a ruler, but later texts will show this to be the type of prostration most commonly reported in the Bible. There is a recurrence in Genesis ۴۳:۲۶. In Genesis ۴۸:۱۲ Joseph himself prostrates to the earth before his father. At this time and at the time of .later kings, prostration to the earth was not yet reserved for God alone

In Exodus ۳۴:۸, Moses bows to the earth in prostration before the appearance of God. The same practice appears in Joshua ۵:۱۴. `And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did '?worship, and said unto him, What said my Lord unto his servant

Three figures are mentioned in this text, Joshua, the `captain of the host', and the Lord. It is clear from the end of the verse that the captain of the host is a divine messenger, that is, an angel. `My Lord' (adoni) at the end of the verse seems to refer .to the angel

There is some ambiguity in the wording of the text. It would be possible to understand the construction to mean that Joshua prostrated to the earth before the angel. It

is not necessary to read it in this way, however. There is no object suffix attached to the words `he worshipped'. Therefore worship of God in the general meaning may be implied, and not prostration to the messenger seen by Joshua. If the text intends to say that Joshua prostrated on the earth in worship of God, this would be a similar case to that of the servant of Abraham, who worshipped God before Laban and Bethuel. Since the angel appeared as a captain of the army, this could well be prostration of .fear as in the case of Manoah

What is absolutely clear in the text is the manner or form of worship. The expression .`fell on his face to the earth' can only mean prostration on earth

In Joshua ۷:۶, Joshua prostrates on earth before the ark. This worship of God is in .petition after the defeat before Ai

Judges ۱۳:۲۰ reports the prostration to earth on the part of Manoah and his wife after the angel had revealed the coming birth of Samson to them. It is not clear in this text whether they prostrated to the angel, who had already disappeared; to God; or whether they merely fell to the ground fainting before the miraculous fire and the .ascension of the angel

In Ruth ۲:۱۰, Ruth prostrates to the earth in gratitude to Boas. This is another occurrence of prostration to earth before a superior such as governor, king, father, or .master

Another type of prostration to earth appears in ۱

Samuel ۲۰:۴۱. Here David makes three such prostrations to his friend Jonathan out of an excess of emotion upon seeing him. ۱ Samuel ۲۴:۸ reports David's prostration to the earth in respect of the anointed king. ۱ Samuel ۲۵:۲۳,۴۱ reports a similar prostration to .David by Abigail

The most surprising prostration to earth is reported in ۱ Samuel ۲۸:۱۴. Saul the king .prostrates to earth before the spectre of the dead Samuel

Samuel ۱:۲; ۱۴:۲۲,۳۳; ۱۸:۲۸; and ۲۴:۲۰ all report prostrations to the earth before David ۲ the King. In ۱۸:۲۸ the invocation of God, however, shows that such prostration does not imply worship. Even while prostrating before the king, Ahimaaz prays to God and not the king. ۱ Kings ۱:۲۳ shows the prophet Nathan doing such prostration before .David. ۱ Chronicles ۲۱:۲۱ reports a final prostration on earth to David as king

There is an important text in ۱ Kings ۱۸:۴۲. `So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put '.his face between his knees

Elijah's prayer for rain is described as seven prostrations to the earth. This text gives the detail about prostration, that the knees are flexed and drawn up so that the face is against the earth directly in front of and between the knees. This description rules .out a position with the legs extended and the stomach against the earth

Another clarifying text is ۲ Kings ۵:۱۷-۱۸. `And Naaman said, Shall

there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord. In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing'.

The story of the conversion of Naaman contains this note on prostration and earth. The ancient concept of earth defilement through idolatry, murder, and other crimes seems to appear here. Naaman takes earth undefiled with idolatry from the place of the prophet specifically for the purpose of providing an undefiled place of sacrifice and prayer.

This is immediately tied to the situation of prostration (note the Hebrew word translated `worship') in the temple of a false god. Prostration in worship is a gesture common to idolatry and the worship of the true God. The implication is that Naaman will actually prostrate in prayer in his own place of worship containing undefiled earth. He asked to be allowed to carry out the forms of his office to the king in the idol temple. He states that he will in fact submit himself in worship to God alone, although he will go through the motions of prostration before the idol on the arm of the

.king

This story is a clear witness that not only ancient Israel but the idolatrous nations surrounding understood the implications of absolute monotheism. They shared the concept of earth defilement which could affect the validity of prayer. In consequence, .prostration on earth is clearly implied

During the reign of Solomon, prostration to the earth in the temple worship of God comes into its own. This is reported in ۲ Chronicles ۷:۳. The practice is reported for later kings as well. In ۲ Chronicles ۲۰:۱۸ we find another example of such .congregational prostration in the temple

In the time of Nehemiah the forms of worship are clearly described. Nehemiah ۸:۶ says, `And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.' Here we have a prayer leader beginning the prayer with a cry on the greatness of God. All the people respond to this indication of the beginning of prayer by raising their hands and speaking aloud. Next there is .bowing and then prostration on earth

There is also a witness to prostration on earth in the texts referring to the prayer of Jesus in the garden that he might be saved from death by crucifixion. Matthew ۲۶:۳۹ contains the expression `he fell on his face in prayer'. Comparing to the same story in Mark we find in Mark ۱۴:۳۵ the addition of the words `upon the earth'. In reporting

this incident Luke does not refer to the prostration on earth at all. Instead, he notes that Jesus places himself on his knees in Luke ۲۲:۴۱. This addition suggests sitting back on the heels with knees bent upon the earth between prostrations. The description .states the prostration to be one with the face on the earth

The final witness is Revelation ۲۲:۸-۹. `And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. Then said he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings '.of this book: worship God

Several points of information can be gleaned from the Bible texts referring to prostration on earth. First of all, it must be mentioned that worship or prostration on any other substance is not mentioned. Prostration on earth is clearly an act of submission by a subordinate to a superior. It was a gesture of worship common to a wide area in the Middle East over a period covering, on the basis of these texts, at least many centuries. It is clearly described as a position with the knees flexed upon the ground and the face on the earth directly in front of and between the knees, in .such a way that sitting on the heels while kneeling between prostrations is possible

In sum, Islamic prayer

is described as normative in the Bible down to the smallest detail of practice with only one exception. From the time of David to the time of Jesus, the direction of prayer is .Jerusalem and not Mecca. Otherwise, the essential features of prayer are identical

Fasting

Both Tabataba'i (۲۴۳-۲۴۵) and Ali (۱۹۸۸:۱۱۷a-۱۱۸a) describe Islamic fasting in the same terms. It consists essentially of making the intention to fast, abstaining from food, drink, sexual intercourse and some other pleasures during the daylight hours of the .month of Ramadhan, that is the ninth lunar month

Besides the obligatory month of fasting other fasts may be followed in the same way. Fasting is made void also by quarrelling. Charity, additional prayers, and acts of justice .are especially maintained during the month of fasting

After discussing prayer in the sermon on the Mount (Matthew six), Jesus approaches fasting. Again, he warns of hypocrisy rather than giving the details of fasting. This is again because the details of fasting were already known. If alms are discussed in preparation for prayer, as representing purification, fasting is an appropriate subject .to follow the subject of prayer

Fasting is almost always mentioned in the Bible along with special prayers of petition. Examples of such fasting are in the time of Esther (Esther ۴:۳ and ۹:۳۱), in the experience of Daniel (Daniel ۶:۱۸ and ۹:۳), and in the advice of Jesus (Matthew ۱۷:۲۱ and Mark ۹:۲۹). The words of David especially connect fasting with prayer of petition: While the child

was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again?' ۲ Samuel ۱۲:۲۲-۲۳.

In this text we see that fasting appears in the Bible along with weeping. Dressing in sackcloth, sitting in ashes, and not wearing perfume are also mentioned (Nehemiah ۹:۱; ۱ Kings ۲۱:۲۷). Proclaiming a fast is often associated with a solemn assembly as well (Joel ۱:۱۴; ۲:۱۵ et al.). It appears that special months of fasting were instituted during the Babylonian captivity of Judah, probably in view of the crisis (Zechariah ۸:۱۹). `Thus said the Lord of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.' This verse clearly suggests that these months of fasting would no longer be observed when the reason for their existence, the Babylonian captivity, disappeared.

But there is no specific legislation dealing with fasting. It is assumed in the Bible text that everyone already knows that fasting is a valid practice and how it should be done. This may indicate that some portions of the Torah have been lost, since legislation is assumed.

In fact, the only fasting mentioned in the Torah or books of Moses is the forty-day

fast of Moses (Exodus ۳۴:۲۸). `And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water.' From this we can see that the fast of the Bible is not a partial one as in Christianity, but complete: absolutely nothing can be .eaten or drunk

From the fast of Moses, of Elijah (۱ Kings ۱۹:۸), and of Jesus (Matthew ۴:۲), we can see that on certain occasions a fast of forty days was required. The great length of this fast indicates that, since it is stated to be complete, it must have permitted some .eating and drinking during the night

Although many of the fasts mentioned in the Bible are certainly personal vows and not general practice, some general fasting practices are found. A specific fast day is mentioned in Jeremiah ۳۶:۶. `Therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the Lord in the ears of the people in the Lord's house upon the fasting day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that '.come out of their cities

Here we find a definite practice of fasting. The following verses will show that this is not just a day of fasting, but precisely a month. More detail on this day of fasting is given in verse nine: `And it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, in the ninth

month, that they proclaimed a fast before the Lord to all the people in Jerusalem, and '.to all the people that came from the cities of Judah unto Jerusalem

This is not a special fast proclaimed by a religious ruler, because this particular king was wicked. Nevertheless, he did follow the formality of what was practiced: the .month of fasting. The time given for this fasting is stated to be the ninth month

The season of the fast in this particular year, thought by many scholars to be ۶۰۴ BC, is stated to be in the winter. Jeremiah ۳۶:۲۲, `Now the king sat in the winter house in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him.' Now the present Jewish calendar adds a thirteenth month from time to time to match the solar year, so that the ninth month of the civil year (used in the dates of kings' reigns) falls in May or June, summer in Palestine. If we project the lunar calendar presently used in the Middle East back in history, we find that the ninth month falls in November of the year ۶۰۴ BC. It appears that during Bible times a purely lunar calendar was used, and the .ninth month was a month of fasting

Bible fasting includes more than just not eating and drinking, however. Isaiah ۵۸ is the great fasting chapter of the Bible. `Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labors. Behold, ye

fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loosen the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?' Isaiah ۵۸:۳-۷.

From this we see that fasting includes avoiding certain pleasures on one hand, and doing acts of charity and justice on the other. That is, there are some other pleasures besides food and drink that must be avoided. Also, the central meaning of the fast has to do with feeling for the hunger of the hungry and doing something to alleviate it. In addition, especially the practice of using sackcloth and ashes seems to be condemned. We find the same condemnation, because of its connection with hypocrisy, mentioned by Jesus in Matthew six.

So we

find fasting a basic, though unlegislated, practice throughout the Bible, from Moses to Peter and Paul (Acts ۱۰:۳۰; ۱۴:۲۳; ۲۷:۳۳; and ۱ Corinthians ۷:۵). In summary, we can say that Biblical fasting is the complete abstention from eating and drinking and some other pleasures during the daylight hours of the days of the ninth month of the lunar calendar. It includes acts of charity, alms and justice, and the especial avoidance of .anger and quarrelling. As such it is identical with Islamic practice

Pilgrimage

Ali (۱۹۸۸:۱۱۸a-۱۲۱a) gives detailed descriptions of Islamic pilgrimage. It takes place in the twelfth month of the lunar calendar and consists of a journey to Mecca and rites there culminating in a rite of sacrifice and shaving the head. It includes circumambulation of the Kaaba or house of God and a prayer of two units at the .beginning, middle and end of the pilgrimage event

The final subject of Jesus' address on the mount in Matthew six appears to be pilgrimage. The place of pilgrimage was a subject of controversy in Jesus' time. The Jews claimed Jerusalem, the Samaritans the mount of Jacob as the place of .pilgrimage

Jesus said to a Samaritan woman, `Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in

.spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.' John ۴:۲۱-۲۳

Besides pointing out that salvation, that is he himself, came from among the Jews, Jesus notes something about the place of pilgrimage. Firstly, he notes that there will be a time when it will be neither in Jerusalem nor in the mountain of the Samaritans. Secondly, he points out that it will be in a place where those who truly worship God will .come

The place of pilgrimage is mentioned in Deuteronomy twelve along with some indications of what is included in its festival. The place is `the place which the Lord your God shall choose', (verses ۵, ۱۱, ۱۴, ۱۸, and ۲۱). The pilgrimage event is largely a time of sacrifice. The Bible even states, however, that if the place of pilgrimage is too .(far away, the sacrifice may be performed at home (Deuteronomy ۱۲:۲۱

The law, or books of Moses, does not state when the time of pilgrimage is. In fact, the Bible as we have it does not give the specific date of the pilgrimage. It seems to .assume that people know it. There is a way of finding the approximate date, however

If we look at the order of the book of Psalms in the Bible, we find that the book is divided into five parts. The first four parts end with a special formula, amen, so we know there is a break there. The fifth part, Psalms ۱۰۷-۱۵۰, is really made up of a

series of collections. The first collection is Psalms ۱۰۷-۱۱۸, and this is appropriate for use in the first of the annual festivals mentioned in the Torah (Leviticus ۲۳:۵-۱۴), Passover and Unleavened Bread, which comes in the seventh month (or the first .(Torah month

Psalm ۱۱۹ is really a collection of Psalms in itself and is appropriate for the second festival mentioned (Leviticus ۲۳:۱۵-۲۲), Pentecost, which comes in the ninth month and is a memorial of the giving of the Torah or law to Moses. This festival has been .retained as Ramadhan in Islamic tradition. The third collection is .Psalms ۱۲۰-۱۳۴

Each one of these Psalms bears the title in Hebrew, `A Song of Pilgrimage'. But if we look at the list in Leviticus, this festival is missing. The next festival in the list is Trumpets and Atonement (Leviticus ۲۳:۲۳-۳۲), and this fits the next collection of Psalms, that is, Psalms ۱۳۵-۱۴۵. This festival comes during the first ten days of the first month (the seventh Torah month), and has been preserved as the Ashura of .Muharrem in Islamic tradition

The final group of Psalms is Psalms ۱۴۶-۱۵۰. Each of these Psalms has the title `Hallelujah', and is appropriate to the last festival, the feast of Tabernacles in .Leviticus ۲۳:۳۳-۳۷. This is a feast of thanksgiving in the third quarter of the first month

The structure of the book of Psalms thus reveals that there is a festival of pilgrimage sometime after the ninth month and sometime before the first month. A

year-end pilgrimage and sacrifice at the house of God is thus clearly a Bible practice from ancient times. This is apparently the pilgrimage to which Jesus was referring in .Matthew six

Although not all of the many details of Islamic pilgrimage appear in the Bible, the primary features do occur. The timing of the pilgrimage is the same for the Bible and in Islam. The features of sacrifice, prayer and circumambulation are primary in both the Bible and Islam. The only contrasting detail is the place of pilgrimage, which is Mecca in Islam. But the place of pilgrimage in the Bible was moveable at an early stage, and was prophesied by Jesus himself to be someday moved from Jerusalem to .another place. In sum, Islamic pilgrimage is basically the same as that of the Bible

Sacrifice

The paradigm of sacrifice in the Bible, and indeed in Islam, is the sacrifice of Abraham. The faithfulness of Abraham in offering up his son has caught the holy imagination of every faith. The Biblical account is found in Genesis twenty-two. `And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt '.offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of

This text has precipitated one of the great battles

between the books, with Jews and Christians on one side and Muslims on the other, for the Qur'an reports a similar test for Ishmael rather than Isaac. The key to understanding the text is in the phrase 'thine only son'. The fact is that, even according to the Bible, Isaac was never Abraham's only son. Either the Bible has made .a terrible mistake here, or we are dealing with something else

.There is a consistent and coherent explanation

All over the world there are rites of passage as they are called for young people about the time of puberty. Nearly all of them include some kind of symbolic acts representing the death and rebirth of the initiate. Very often they include a substitution sacrifice to represent the death of the youth. The phrase 'thine only son' fits consistently into a rite of this type, as does the rest of the conversation in the .chapter

The phrase is obviously a part of the liturgical formula for the sacrifice of the firstborn. Normally the first-born is the only son thus sacrificed, but in the case of polygamy, when the rite is repeated for the first-born of each wife, it may not be literally true. In the case of Isaac it was not, but since it was a part of the ritual formula, the phrase was used in his case as it undoubtedly had been somewhat more accurately used in the case of Ishmael earlier. Both the Qur'an and the Bible report matters

.correctly

This consistent understanding of the text not only reconciles the Bible and the Qur'an, but deflates the belief in human sacrifice. To imagine this to be a real test, in which Abraham actually agrees to offer his son, and is stopped from killing him only at the last moment, is to lay the foundation for accepting human sacrifice. The result in .Christian theology is to make a human sacrifice the core of belief

The fact that Abraham lived in a society which according to archaeologists actually committed human sacrifice sheds light on the meaning of the text. Although such sacrifice was expected in the time and place, still Abraham did not engage in it. He engaged in a substitution ritual which in itself indicates more clearly than anything .could that the Bible tradition does not accept human sacrifice under any condition

Sacrifice in Islam occurs during the pilgrimage and at other important occasions such as the birth of a child. The sacrificial animal must be of a clean sort. It is placed facing Mecca, the name of God must be pronounced, and it is cut so that the arteries of the throat and windpipe are severed and the blood drained. Sacrifice in Islam can .(generally be replaced with fasting. On sacrifice, note Ali (۱۹۸۸:۱۲۰a

The first examples of sacrifice in the Bible are narrated without a command in Genesis ۴:۳-۷ and ۸:۲۰-۲۱. The first command to sacrifice in the Bible was given to Abraham (Genesis ۱۵:۹). It is significant that the faith which

claims to represent the faith of Abraham, Islam, is the one in which sacrifice is .retained to this day

The rather fluid system of family sacrifice of the patriarchal period, which is very much like that of Islam today, gave way to a complex temple system of sacrifice as described in the Torah and the prophetic writings. This sacrificial legislation appears to have had the function of systematizing and limiting sacrifice among a people whose generosity was likely to cause at times the problem of oversacrifice, if the sacrifices every six steps at the removal of the ark at the time of David is any indication. The sacrificial legislation of some parts of the Torah conflicts with the practice in others and with the sacrificial system described in the final chapters of Ezekiel. This indicates .the possibility of some variation

There is apparently an early trend against blood sacrifice in the Bible as well. We see this especially in the Psalms and the prophets. Psalm ۵۱:۱۶. `For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.' Isaiah ۱:۱۱ `To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? said the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight '.not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats

Since the temple at

Jerusalem was lost in the seventh decade of the Christian era, there has been no sacrifice in rabbinical Judaism. In Christianity, the sacrifices of the Hebrew Scriptures are considered as types prophetic of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, after which no sacrifice can take place. The sacrifice of Jesus is either re-enacted or remembered in the Eucharist where the bread and wine are blessed and thought to be, contain or .represent the body and blood of the sacrificed Jesus

The vicarious sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross is thought to be an essential requisite for the forgiveness of sin. Muslims have generally, but not universally, denied the crucifixion altogether. Obviously that is a stand the Bible does not share, since the crucifixion is definitely maintained in the Gospels. The substitution theory, known from the Gospel of Barnabas, does not seem reconcilable with the canonical Gospels. The swoon theory, whereby Jesus was crucified but did not die, is somewhat more tenable, but requires the assumption that the disciples were ignorant of the true .facts

What is in conflict with Islam is not the death and resurrection of Jesus as such. It is the vicarious sacrifice for sin which is absolutely and altogether unacceptable. The easiest and most direct path to that goal is merely to deny the crucifixion altogether. .But in so doing, the Muslim must reject the Gospel narrative

The Christian doctrine of the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus has only two Biblical sources. The first is the allegorical interpretation of

the sacrificial system of the Hebrew Scriptures. The second is the metaphorical application of the Paschal lamb to Jesus in the writings of Paul and Peter. There is no .Gospel justification at all

The only condition for forgiveness in the Gospel is in Matthew ۶:۱۴-۱۵. We are forgiven as we forgive others. The Christian doctrine, despite being so central to the faith, has only the most tenuous Scriptural foundation. Although Muslims do not do so, they could find a far firmer basis for their rejection of a vicarious sacrifice for sin in .Scripture than the Christians find in favor of their doctrine

I shall not discuss further the historicity of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Some of the non-canonical Gospels do not even mention it. One, the Gospel of Barnabas, even denies it outright. It is undeniable, however, that the New Testament teaches the historical crucifixion and resurrection. But this does not imply that the New Testament teaches that this was a sacrifice in atonement for sin which God .required in order to be able to forgive sins

There are two facts that cannot be denied. First, the Christian establishment maintains that Jesus gave himself as a sacrifice for sin on the cross and without that sacrifice God could not forgive sin. The second historical fact is that the followers of Jesus Christ went on participating in the sacrificial system of the temple in Jerusalem .until its destruction in AD ۷۰

The amazing truth is that the apostolic church, for more than

a generation after the ascension of Jesus, still offered the Old Testament sacrifices. Did they not know that Jesus had already paid the price for sin? Or was that a belief that only arose later? The only consistent answer is that it is a later belief, one .completely unknown to Paul, Jesus or any of the disciples of the first century

The epistle to the Hebrews clearly teaches that Jesus replaces the temple service, its sacrifices and its priests. But the historical fact is that such belief came only in connection with the destruction of the temple. What really happened is that the followers of Jesus continued their Jewish worship of the one true God until that .worship system was destroyed

After that, Jews had only the synagogues and Christians only their primitive churches. The temple sacrificial system ended for both. But while the Jews continued to bewail the temple for two thousand years, the Christians were comforted in another way. The devastated Christians, some of whom no doubt thought their sins could no longer be forgiven with the temple destroyed, sought comfort in Jesus Christ. When they .needed him most, he came in to replace the temple, its services and its priests

But it is quite a different thing to maintain that God demands a blood sacrifice in atonement for sin. Sacrifices were always a part of worship. Cain and Abel wanted to bring a sacrifice to God. So did Noah and Abraham. The first command to sacrifice was given to

Abraham (Genesis ۱۵:۹). The people in early times were more generous than people .(today, so God had to limit sacrifice during the time of Moses (Exodus ۳۶:۶-۷

All of the regulations about sacrifices in the books of Moses tell how little should be offered, not how much. But it was next to impossible to get the people to see this. Later, in David's time, when the ark was removed to Jerusalem, they stopped to offer sacrifices every six steps (۲ Samuel ۶:۱۳). Ancient people wanted to honor God and affirm their sincerity in prayer by offering sacrifices. But God never required anything but sincere repentance in order to forgive sins. `Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not .required.' Psalm ۴۰:۶

The practice of blood drainage in slaughter as well as sacrifice is one of the things the Jerusalem council maintained for Gentile converts (Acts ۱۵:۲۰,۲۹). Despite the variation in practice, the maintaining of purity code in the kind of sacrifice and the method of .slaughter is a constant from beginning to end

The Christian belief that God requires the blood of an innocent human being before He can forgive is somewhat disconcerting. It does not seem that the Bible maintains the doctrine. The Bible does comfort those who lost the temple with the fact that Jesus Christ remains and is far better than any priest or sacrifice. It does legislate the ,limiting of sacrifices at the time of Moses

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.so that there would be less slaughtering of animals in every place

In no place does Jesus declare that he was a sacrifice in atonement for sin. The only condition he ever set for forgiveness of sin was that we forgive one another (Matthew ۶:۱۴-۱۵). The apostles later used language that emphasized the necessity of believing in Christ for forgiveness, and in this they were consistent with the concept of divinely .appointed leadership

This is not to deny that the innocent suffering and even death of a sinless human being is redemptive. This belief goes far back into Judaism long before the appearance of Jesus. It is very much in evidence at the time of the Maccabees. It continues after Christianity and appears in Islam with the tragic martyrdom of Husayn .at Karbala

But none of these deaths satisfy the demands of a stern God thirsting for blood or exacting the necessary ransom or penalty as the Christian doctrine would have it. All of the references to the blood of Christ and his sacrifice on the cross can be understood either as redemptive in this sense, or as metaphorical of the Gospel experience. This is supported by Jesus himself when he says, `Greater love hath no '.man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends

The idea that God is in the sin business, that He takes pay for sin, is a strange one. It seems Biblical that there is no penalty to be paid to him. `The wages of

sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life.' Romans ۶:۲۳. It is strange that Christians claim that sin is forgiven by grace alone, and then inconsistently go on to maintain .that God requires a blood sacrifice

If God's grace is infinite and sufficient, no sacrifice can add to it. If God's grace is not sufficient, then He is not God. This is the real point. It is non-Biblical gods who require human sacrifices. When such trinities of gods are superimposed in the place of the God of Biblical revelation, then human sacrifice naturally follows along. This is the .origin of the Christian doctrine. Human sacrifice is not acceptable in the Bible

What is the Gospel experience of which the expressions of sacrifice in the experience of Jesus are metaphors? According to Paul, the sacrifice that God requires is the sacrifice of ourselves and of all we have in His service. `I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is .that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.' Romans ۱۲:۱-۲

There are specifically two subjects in this passage. In verse one there is a description of `reasonable service'. The word `service' refers specifically to worship. For Paul, the core of liturgy is the sacrifice of oneself as a

living gift to God. Such sacrifice alone is holy and acceptable to God. Animal sacrifices, the offering of formal prayer, the recitation of Psalms and other inspired texts of praise and worship, and calling on the name of God, all are vain and useless without .the desire to offer oneself as a living sacrifice to God

In verse two there is reference to everything else, all that is not liturgical. It entails `proving' what is the will of God. Paul does not refer to mechanical obedience on one hand, or even the obedience of love and loyalty as such on the other. Rather, he gives .a method of attaining the good, acceptable and perfect will of God in everyday life

Paul sees a two-step process. The first step is the mental preparation. It is the willingness not to conform. There is probably nothing so difficult to give up as conformity. But the doctrine of the unity of God quite definitely and directly implies that conformity, that is, obedience to the common opinions of the time and place, is idolatry. The unity of God has not space to spare for public opinion and conformity to it. It has only room for conformity to the will of God. Conformity to anything else is .unacceptable

The second step is the mental transformation. Like the first step, this is the reasonable effect of liturgical self-sacrifice. The act of giving oneself as a living sacrifice in worship has definite repercussions on the rest of life. It transforms the

mind, bringing the soul into conformity to the will of God. It is very likely that this Pauline concept of personal liturgy and its spiritual ramifications differ little from .Islamic concepts of prayer in prostration

It seems that Islam best represents the Biblical description of sacrifice. It includes the .possibility on certain occasions to sacrifice clean animals by draining the blood

There is a healthy limitation of sacrifice, and recognition of the heart condition of the .worshiper as of primary importance

Usury

Islamic banking is well-known in the financial world and is becoming popular as an investment alternative even outside the sphere of Islam. The prohibition of usury or charging interest on any lending is described in the literature of every Islamic school of jurisprudence. In justification of the prohibition Ali (۱۹۸۸, ۱۴۱a) quotes Qur'an ۲:۲۷۵ `Those who swallow interest will not (be able to) stand (in resurrection) except as '.standeth one whom Satan hath confounded with his touch

The Bible is also very clear on the matter of usury. It is in perfect harmony with Islam. The Arabic term for usury, raba, is rather neutral, coming from a root meaning to remain over or increase. The Biblical term for usury, neshek, is strongly negative, .coming from a root whose basic meaning is to strike as a serpent

The term neshek itself is used twelve times in the Bible, but related words are used several times as well. All of them either prohibit usury or speak of it in deprecating .terms

Leviticus ۲۵:۳۶,۳۷. `Take thou

no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase.' The Hebrew term for increase here, tarbath, is a cognate of the Arabic riba. The word `or' in the translation of verse ٣۶ is an interpretation of the undesignated copula we-..This is an example of the typical Hebrew habit of pairing synonyms

Exodus ٢٢:٢۵. `If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as a usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.' This text already brings up the question of whether usury in general is prohibited, or merely usury of a brother, that is one under the covenant of God. The Torah has been interpreted to .permit usury from unbelievers

Deuteronomy ٢٣:١٩-٢٠. 'Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of anything that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither '.thou goest to possess it

Here the import of the passage in Exodus becomes clear. Usury is prohibited from those under the covenant, but permitted from strangers, that is, unbelieving heathens. Beyond this clarification there is an interesting remark on economy. The strength and well-being

.of the economic situation is considered to depend on the avoidance of usury

Psalm ۱۵:۱-۵. `Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that putteth not out his money to usury...' The prohibition of usury in the Psalms is .universal, whether the loan is made to believers or unbelievers

Jeremiah ۱۵:۱۰. `Woe is me, my mother, that thou has borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me.' The words of Jeremiah imply not only a prohibition on lending with interest, but on borrowing with interest as well. .The guilt is thus attached to both parties in the transaction

As part of the divine definition of justice we find in Ezekiel ۱۸:۸-۹, `He that hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase... he is just, he shall surely live, said the Lord God.' This is a positive approach to the problem, as well as another .affirmation that neshek and tarbith are equivalent

Ezekiel ۱۸:۱۳ makes the point negatively, `Hath given forth upon usury, and hath taken increase: shall he then live? he shall not live: he hath done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him.' The context suggests that the abomination of usury is one of the sins provoking the Babylonian captivity. Verses seventeen and eighteen release the innocent children

.of the effects of their parents' sins in taking usury

Ezekiel ٢٢:١٢. `In thee have they taken gifts to shed blood; thou has taken usury and increase, and thou hast greedily gained of thy neighbors by extortion, and hast forgotten me, said the Lord God.' The taking of usury is equated here with bribes in judgement resulting in the execution of the innocent, and with extortion. Ezekiel thus .defines more carefully what he means by `abominations' in chapter eighteen

After the captivity the matter of usury arose again, and was put to a quick end by the intervention of Nehemiah. Nehemiah's argument is not based on fear of renewed captivity as a result of usury. Rather, he appeals directly to law and justice. Having .authority as governor, his measures were met with success: Nehemiah five

The Gospel references to usury are neither legislative nor normative. In a parable we find Jesus quoting a master scolding a servant for neglecting his property. Matthew ٢٥:٢٧ 'Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.' The same story is repeated in Luke ١٩:٢٣. Jesus makes no comment here on usury as such. The text does reveal that Jesus' hearers were familiar with the practice and that at least some, those .having capital, approved of it. The context might well be lending to unbelievers

In sum, usury is prohibited in the Torah when between believers. The prophets suggest usury to be one of

the factors resulting in the Babylonian captivity. Ezekiel uses very strong language against usury, equating it with bribery and extortion. The Psalms seem to apply the .prohibition not merely within the context of believers but in general

Although it appears that the Torah at least might permit usury in some contexts, the sum of Biblical teaching comes down firmly against it. The Islamic form of banking .finds support not only in the Qur'an but in the Bible as well

Marriage

The subject of marriage as such, the practice of polygamy to the extent of up to four wives, and the practice of timed or temporary marriage in Islam have come under fire from outside observers. It is of utmost interest to note the Biblical legislation on these .issues. Ali (۱۹۸۸:۱۳۹a-۱۴۰a) defends temporary marriage and polygamy

In Islam marriage is a contractual agreement between two parties. A man may contract up to four full, dowered, simultaneous marriages. Divorce is also allowed. Concubinage or limited contracts are also permitted, even with the limitation of time. Adultery is punishable according to Islamic law by death. There is no ideal of celibacy .in Islam, and marriage and reproduction are a foremost duty

From the very beginning the Bible seems to support Islamic values. Genesis ۱:۲۸A is the first direct divine command to human beings in the Bible. It is the command to reproduce. Reproduction is a divinely appointed duty and not a matter of choice. To .choose not to reproduce is to disobey the divine command

.Human reproduction is reaffirmed by direct command in Genesis ۸:۱۷; ۹:۱,۷; and ۳۵:۱۱

Marriage is instituted by holy example with a ritual marriage formula spoken by the man in Genesis ۲:۲۳-۲۴. The text in Genesis ۳:۱۶ relates specifically to the situation of Eve and cannot be generalized. Eve is placed under the rule of her husband because of her role in mediating the temptation to him. This is not evidence of the subordina-.tion of the wife in general

On the contrary, the list of subordinates in Exodus ۲۰:۱۰ does not mention the wife as a subordinate, which suggests that she is on an equal status with her husband. The sorrow of conception is a prophecy of the tragedy of Cain and Abel. The prophecy is given to prepare Eve for what will be an insupportable horror, and as such is a grace. The text does not imply that Eve is being punished with the pain of childbirth, rather .she is being warned that her child would later cause her sorrow

Genesis ۴:۱۹ is the first example of polygamy in the Bible, and it is the example of a wicked person. The list of generations in Genesis five give holy examples of people

carrying out the command to reproduce. Genesis ۱۶:۲ is the first case of multiple marriage by a righteous person. By holy example Abraham institutes multiple marriages under the condition that it is agreeable to the first wife and for the purpose of carrying out the command to reproduce in the case

of a barren wife. The example also provides the possibility of marriage by purchase, .since Hagar is said to be a handmaid of Sarah. She was not provided with a dowry

Although no new example is given in the Biblical story of Lot in Genesis nineteen, there are passages which can be misunderstood. In verse eight, Lot offers his daughters to the men of Sodom in lawful marriage in his judgement against their attempted homosexual rape. In so doing he gives a positive injunction for marriage, .rather than delivering his daughters up to degradation

In Genesis ۱۹:۳۱-۳۸, the details show clearly that Lot did not accept incest. The fact that the daughters in the story give Lot wine to hide their plan indicates clearly that they knew their father would not agree to the arrangement. In verses thirty-three and thirty-five the expression `he perceived not' shows that Lot is blameless. Thus .the story does not condone such behavior

Nevertheless, assuming that legislation at the time of Lot was somewhat less than what we now possess, the actions of the daughters of Lot should not be judged on the basis of our greater knowledge. Their motivation was not degraded. It was a misguided attempt at obeying the basic command to reproduce. The lesson of the experience is to show us to what lengths a human being can go when he depends on his own judgement or the judgement of other human beings in determining what is right and wrong. The story of

.the daughters of Lot confirms the need for divine guidance

Genesis ۲۰:۱۲ raises again the issue of incest, stating that Sarah and Abraham were children of the same father. This does not necessarily mean that they were from the same biological father. It could very well mean that they were from the same ancestor on the father's side. In many cultures there is no distinction in terms .between siblings and parallel cousins

The use of the word father in Semitic languages is very broad indeed. Two men are known to have been called the father of Abraham, and only one of them can have been his biological father. Terah is known from Genesis ۱۱:۲۷ et al., while Azar is known from the Qur'an ۶:۷۵ et al. There is no reason to assume that Abraham and Sarah were biological siblings, whereas there is every reason to assume they were .not

At this point we come to the issue of limited marriage or concubinage. The texts of the Bible can be classified in three groups: those spoken by God Himself and thus giving direct divine commands; those describing the holy example of prophets and other human beings with God-given authority to serve as such holy examples; and finally those texts describing the behavior of ordinary people whose example we might not follow. Obviously the first category is normative, whereas the last is not. The second .category also has a certain degree of normative value

In principle we could be certain that concubinage is meant only

for those texts where the word `Pilegesh' occurs. This word is of uncertain origin. It is used once in the Bible in Ezekiel ۲۳:۲۰ to refer to the male partner in such a .relationship. The word is thus both masculine and feminine without a change in form

The first mention of concubinage in the Bible as that of Nahor in Genesis ۲۲:۲۴. There is another concubine mentioned by name in Genesis ۳۶:۱۲, Timna who was the concubine of Eliphaz, son of Esau. Both of these men were devout, although not holy .examples

But even the use of the word `Pilegesh' does not guarantee that true concubinage is meant. Genesis ۲۵:۶, from the example of Abraham, gives us the only specific regulation characterizing concubinage, that is, that the children of concubines do not inherit from the father. Therefore the use of the word `Pilegesh' in Genesis ۳۵:۲۲ is a loose application of the word to a slave wife whose children did inherit and who was taken as a wife specifically for the purpose of bearing children. This text, however, is .doubtful in any case, and should not be used

In ۱ Chronicles ۱:۳۲, the word `Pilegesh' refers to Keturah, the third wife of Abraham. The Genesis text is ambiguous about this marriage, and it is certain that the marriage was not specifically contracted for producing children. The Genesis text does not state whether Keturah's children inherited with Ishmael or whether they were given gifts .with the children of Abraham's other concubines

There are

no texts of direct, God-given revelation that refer to concubinage as such, although many texts of legislation must refer to marriage of all types. We shall have to turn to the two lower categories of texts to find an indication of the Bible attitudes towards .marriage of pleasure

Abraham is the first holy example of concubinage in the Bible. By holy example concubinage is stated for Abraham in Genesis ۲۵:۶. The word appears here in the plural, indicating that Abraham had more than one concubine. One difference between wife and concubine is stated: the children of the wife inherit, while those of the concubine are given gifts at the father's discretion. This is the one characteristic limitation of concubinage which the Bible states. It otherwise seems to assume that .concubinage is well-known and needs no further description

The extensive marriage description in Genesis twenty four adds little legislation. Genesis ۲۴:۴ suggests by holy example that relatives are preferable mates than non… relatives, but the real sense of the text may be a distinction between worshipers of .God and idolaters. Genesis ۲۴:۵۳ institutes the dowry by holy example

Although it appears from verse fifty-eight that Rebecca consented eagerly to the marriage, verse fifty-one goes so far as to suggest that the decision for the marriage was made by the male guardians that is father and brother. Genesis ۲۴:۶۵ indicates the wearing of a veil in the presence of the bridegroom before marriage. The matters of male guardians and the veil are not established by

.holy example, since the personages referred to are not authoritative

By holy example in Genesis ۲۵:۲۱, Isaac makes supplication to God for his wife's barrenness. Almost all preceding legislation is confirmed by the holy example of Jacob's marriages in Genesis ۲۹:۱۵-۳۰:۲۴. Jacob had two dowered wives and two slave .wives. No concubines are mentioned

The only new problem of legislation is the marrying of sisters. This practice is contradicted by direct divine command in Leviticus ۱۸:۱۸. We must therefore re… examine the text. Laban is the father of Leah and Rachel, the two sisters who married Jacob. Our English usage of the word father may be leading us astray, for the Semitic usage is much broader and may well refer to a common male ancestor, the living leader of the clan to which both women belong as sisters. Since this is precisely as likely on the basis of the word usage as our first, normal assumption, we must choose the meaning of living male ancestor instead of biological father, because it permits reconciliation with law. The same phenomenon explains the matter of Abraham and .Sarah

By holy example in Genesis ۳۴:۱۵ it is prohibited for a guardian to consent to the .marrying of a believer woman to an uncircumcised man

The incestuous relation reported in Genesis ۳۵:۲۲, at least on the basis of the Masoretic signs, seems to be a textual corruption. It may be a gloss in explanation of Genesis ۴۹:۴. It is serious because of its implication of one of the sons

of the prophet, but is a text purporting to be the words of a human rather than a quotation from God. If the text is accepted, then Genesis ۴۹:۴ would clearly state the .behavior to be unacceptable

The levirate, or responsibility of the next of kin for the widow, is instituted by holy example in Genesis ۳۸:۸-۱۱. The responsibility includes producing children in the name of the deceased. The story of Tamar in Genesis ۳۸:۱۳-۲۶ is another example of a misguided attempt to obey the command to reproduce. Just as in the story of the daughters of Lot, subterfuge on the part of Tamar leaves Judah guiltless of incest. The action of Tamar only serves again to emphasize how the attempt to obey God .without taking divine guidance into consideration will eventually lead astray

Judah's behavior in this story must be examined. In verse twenty-six, Judah recognizes his fault in not giving his third son Shelah to Tamar as the law of levirate demanded. When Judah learns that the unknown woman with whom he has contracted a marriage is his daughter-in-law, he has no more marital relations with her. It appears that Judah consistently applies marriage legislation except in denying Tamar to Shelah, for this is the only fault he acknowledges. We must therefore look .for the legal basis of Judah's relations with Tamar

Verses ۱۶-۱۸ describe the negotiations between Judah and Tamar. These are ordinarily understood as the negotiations between a man and a prostitute. If Judah thought that Tamar was

a prostitute, which is not certain, it does not imply that he did not marry her. We have already seen from verse twenty-six that Judah does not acknowledge having made a .negotiation of prostitution. He condemns prostitution in his judgement of Tamar

We know also that Judah, as one of the twelve sons of Jacob, is a holy example. We must therefore conclude that Judah was contracting a marriage dowry. The sons of Tamar are therefore not illegitimate, despite the fact that the marriage was terminated when Judah learned who his wife was. The termination of the marriage is not described in detail. We do not know if it was terminated by divorce, by shortening a contract of concubinage, or by the lapse of the time of contract. This is possibly an example of concubinage, as it is not certain what kind of contract Judah made with .Tamar

Legislation on marriage continues in Exodus ۲۰:۱۴, which is a part of the decalogue and thus has more validity than any other passage, since it was spoken directly by God without the mediation of a prophet. Exodus ۲۰:۱۴, reiterated in Deuteronomy ۵:۱۸, .prohibits sexual activity outside contracted marriage for married people

The foundation of this command seems to be a concern with the right of children to know with certainty the identity of both biological mother and father. It thus implies the prohibition of adoption which distorts such identity through hiding or changing the name. It also implies the prohibition of artificial insemination

by secret or anonymous donors. The command reveals nothing about the permanence of marriage or the number of marriage partners. The command is reconfirmed in Leviticus ١٨:٢٠.

Exodus ٢١:٧-١١ adds detailed legislation in explanation of marriage by purchase instead of marriage by dowry. Verse seven states that marriage by purchase may be contracted only through the father of the bride. This prevents slave trade. Verse seven prohibits temporary marriage through purchase. This prevents prostitution of daughters by fathers. Verse eight permits divorce by redemption.

Divorce by selling the wife to another partner or trader is forbidden. Only the father may redeem. Verse nine permits purchase of a wife to the son of the purchaser, in which case the wife has the rights of a daughter. Verses ten and eleven relate to the taking of another wife. Power to take another wife by either purchase or dowry is on three conditions: the first wife must retain her original level of food, clothing and marital rights. Diminution of any of these three gives her the right of free divorce, without obligation to return the redemption money to her husband.

Exodus ٢١:٢٢-٢٥ refers to accidental injury to a pregnant woman by an outside party. Injury resulting in miscarriage must be compensated according to the demands of the husband and judges. Injury to the woman must be punished by the infliction of the same injury on the perpetrator. `An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' relates to the case of injury to

.a pregnant woman

Exodus ۲۲:۱۶-۱۷ refers to fornication, that is sexual activity between a man and unmarried woman. In such a case, the man is obliged to endow the woman as wife. He is obliged to give the full dowry of virgins, even if the father of the woman refuses to give her to him in marriage. Leviticus ۱۸:۶-۲۰ lists the degrees of relationship prohibited for marriage: father, mother, father's wife, sister being either daughter of mother or father, son's daughter or daughter's daughter, father's sister, mother's sister, father's brother, father's brother's wife, son's wife, brother's wife, wife's daughter, wife's son's daughter, wife's daughter's daughter, wife's sister .simultaneously

Leviticus ۱۹:۲۰-۲۲ relates to sexual relations between a man and another man's purchased wife. There is no death penalty for either: the woman must be scourged and the man to give a trespass offering consisting of a ram. Leviticus ۱۹:۲۹ prohibits prostituting one's daughter. Leviticus ۲۰:۱۰-۱۲,۱۴,۱۷ provides penalties for certain sexual acts. Adultery, or sexual activity between a man and the wife of another, demands the death penalty for both parties. Sexual activity with one's father's wife or one's daughter-in-law demands death for both parties. Marriage to a woman and her .daughter demands death by burning for all three parties

Ostracism is the penalty for marrying sister or half-sister. Leviticus ۲۰:۱۹-۲۱ provide childlessness as the penalty for marrying father's or mother's sister, uncle's wife, or .brother's wife

Leviticus ۲۱:۷,۹,۱۳-۱۴ relates to the reproduction of Israelite priests, descendants of Aaron. Verses ۷, ۱۳-۱۴ require that the priest

marry only a virgin. Verse nine provides the penalty of burning to death with fire for .the daughter of a priest who engages in illicit sexual activity

Numbers ۵:۱۱-۳۱ provides for the case of adultery in which there is no witness. The ritual curse identifies and in itself punishes the woman who has committed adultery .without witnesses to the crime

Numbers twelve raises another point of holy example on the part of Moses. Moses took a second wife beside Zipporah, who was a Midianite, a descendant of Abraham and Keturah. His second wife was an Ethiopian. Aaron and Miriam opposed the marriage, either out of misguided jealousy for Zipporah, racism, or opposition to .polygamy

Racism and opposition to polygamy are charges too serious to level at Aaron and Miriam without very strong evidence. Although most modern Western minds balk at polygamy, this is merely a cultural prejudice. The Bible supports polygamy through both direct command and holy example. In the case of the levirate it may even be a .duty

There is no support for polyandry, however, probably because of the concern for the right of children to know the identity of both biological father as well as mother. Moses apparently married the Ethiopian woman while Israel was camping at Hazeroth (Numbers ۱۱:۳۵). It is possible that this marriage was one of concubinage, although there is no other evidence for this than the intimation that it may have been .motivated by the desire for temporary pleasure rather than bearing children

Deuteronomy ۷:۳-۴ prohibits marriages between

believers and unbelievers, whether male or female. Deuteronomy ۱۷:۴-۷ regulates the death penalty for sexual crimes. The penalty is death by stoning. Two men or one man and two women are needed as witnesses to invoke the death penalty. The witnesses .must be first in carrying out the execution

Deuteronomy ۱۷:۱۷ prohibits multiple marriage for the king. This should not mean that the king may not have the same privileges in marriage as the commoner. What may be forbidden is the making of treaties with foreign powers sealed by marriage. The .problem still remains, however, since by holy example Solomon did this extensively

Deuteronomy ۲۰:۷ prohibits participation in war to the betrothed whose marriage is not yet consummated. Deuteronomy ۲۱:۱۰-۱۴ regulates marriage to a captive of war. Verses twelve and thirteen determine one month of mourning, with head shaved and nails pared, before the consummation of marriage. Divorce of the captive demands .that she be given freedom. A divorced captive may not be sold

Deuteronomy ۲۲:۱۳-۲۱ refers to accusation of non-virginity at marriage. If one claiming to be a virgin marries and is found not to be a virgin, she is to be stoned. If her husband makes a false claim against her and she produces the proof of her virginity, the husband must pay a hundred pieces of silver to the father and relinquish .the right of divorce

Deuteronomy ۲۲:۲۲-۲۷ reaffirms the death penalty for adultery for both parties. The woman is not punished, however, if the crime happened in the countryside where

her cries for help could not be heard. Deuteronomy ۲۲:۲۸۲۹ refers to the case of rape of an unmarried woman. The man must give a dowry of fifty pieces of silver, the dowry for virgins, and relinquish the right of divorce. Deuteronomy ۲۲:۳۰ reaffirms the prohibition of marrying one's father's wife. Deuteronomy ۲۳:۱۷ reaffirms the .prohibition of prostitution

Deuteronomy ۲۴:۱-۴ regulates divorce. A man may divorce the wife by giving a bill of divorcement. She is then free to marry another. The former husband may not .remarry her if she has been married after his divorcing her

Deuteronomy ۲۴:۵ provides that a man may not go out to war or be charged with any .business for one year after the consummation of marriage

Deuteronomy ۲۵:۵-۱۰ regulates the details of the levirate. If a man dies childless, his next of kin is responsible to marry his wife and the first-born is named as the heir of the one who has died without children. Escape from this responsibility requires legal intervention. The wife must testify to the refusal of the man to marry her before .witnesses, and if he maintains refusal, she must take off his shoe and spit in his face

At this point all of the legislation has been presented. There are of course many holy examples in support of it. In ۱ Samuel ۱:۱۰-۱۱ Hanna by holy example reaffirms supplication in case of barrenness. She clarifies the legislation by the use of a vow of the Nazirite for the hoped for child, by

.which the hair should not be shaved

In ۲ Samuel ۶:۲۰-۲۳, by holy example David punishes his wife Michal by permanently withdrawing conjugal rights from her without divorcing her, in punishment for disrespect to her husband. In ۲ Samuel ۱۱ we have the holy example of David and its .abrogation by the prophet Nathan in ۲ Samuel ۱۲

The betrothed wife of Uriah was divorced by Uriah so that he could participate as a hero in the wars, on the basis of Deuteronomy ۲۰:۷, or the consummated marriage of Uriah to Bathsheba was forfeited by divorce for the same reason on the basis of Deuteronomy ۲۴:۵. David contracted a marriage with Bathsheba in the meantime. Knowing of the intent of Uriah to remarry her after the war, there was disagreement between David and Bathsheba on which of them should inform Uriah of the marriage. Neither was willing to do so, and the situation led to David's willingness to concede to Uriah's desire to be placed in a position where he could attain military glory, hoping that his death would relieve them of the necessity of revealing the new marriage to .him

Because of the questionable motivation involved, this behavior was struck out of holy example by revelation through the prophet Nathan. The general use of this text for facile forgiveness of adultery and murder is not a valid interpretation. Such interpretation would invalidate the law, which provides the death sentence for both murder and adultery. Nathan's words in ۲ Samuel ۱۲:۹

.should be viewed as hyperbole in presenting the case to the king

Samuel ۱۳:۱۳ suggests the possibility of marriage between brother and half-sister, in ۲ conflict with Leviticus ۱۸:۱۱. This may represent ignorance on the part of Tamar, or .more likely, the vain attempt to talk her assailant out of rape

Although marriage and relations outside marriage are dealt with in the other prophetic writings, even in the case of Hosea no new holy example or direct divine revelation appeared. The rest of the examples of concubinage can be briefly .mentioned

In judges ۸:۳۱, we find that Gideon had a concubine by holy example, who bore a son, .Abimelech, who was the first king in Israel

In ۲ Samuel ۵:۱۳, by holy example David contracted concubinage as well as normal marriage with many women. ۲ Samuel ۱۵:۱۶ refers to ten women who were David's concubines. The same group of women is mentioned in ۲ Samuel ۱۶:۲۱-۲۲ and ۲۰:۳. Another group of David's concubines is mentioned in ۲ Samuel ۲۰:۳. David's concubines .are mentioned again in ۱ Chronicles ۳:۹

In ۱ Kings ۱۱:۳, by holy example Solomon contracted marriage with seven hundred women and concubinage with three hundred. The surprising number of wives here is of course not normative. The Bible places no restriction on the number of wives. The .limitation of four wives is one of the few new legislations of the Qur'an

Two concubines are named in ۱ Chronicles ۲:۴۶,۴۸ with whom Caleb contracted. Caleb is not specifically a holy example, but there is no

mention of his ever committing an act which was condemnable. On the contrary, he is often mentioned for his courageous conduct in connection with the successor of Moses, Joshua.

1 Chronicles ۷:۱۴ mentions a concubine of Manasseh, son of Joseph. Since Jacob incorporated both of Joseph's sons into the twelve, Manasseh is also a holy example.

In ۲ Chronicles ۱۱:۲۱ there is mention of concubines for Rehoboam, son of Solomon. Rehoboam, despite his political errors, can be counted as one of the twelve good kings of judah and thus a holy example.

Song of Solomon ۶:۸-۹ bears reference again to the holy example of Solomon in contracting concubinage.

There are thus five or six holy examples of concubinage specifically mentioned in the Bible as such. We shall now examine texts referring to concubinage that cannot be taken as holy example, and texts referring to holy example of marriage which may or may not be concubinage.

There is a long and tragic story about the concubine of a Levite in judges nineteen. There is every reason to believe that this Levite was devout, although he was not a holy example.

The concubine of King Saul is mentioned by name in ۲ Samuel ۳:۷ and again in ۲ Kings ۲۱:۱۱. King Saul is not a holy example, for the kingdom was taken from him for disobedience. David himself, however, continued to treat him as the anointed and gave fealty to him until his death. He can be assumed to have been generally devout.

Esther ۲:۱۴ refers to the concubines

.of King Ahasuerus. This king is not a holy example

At this point it may be pertinent to examine the distribution of cases of concubinage. More than half of the individuals contracting concubinage are holy examples whose exemplary lives were authoritative, God-given revelation which the people of their times were required to imitate. The others, with the exception of Ahasuerus, were .devout people, some of whom have no spot on their record

There is no specific record in the Bible of any wicked personage contracting concubinage. We can assume that at least the wicked kings had concubines, but it is nowhere specifically stated that this is so. In the Bible concubinage is mentioned only in connection with devout living. An explanation of this may be that wicked people generally resorted to prostitution rather than taking on the responsibility of .concubinage

The Scriptures do not deal with length of contract in marriage. Marriage as generally described in the Bible shows evidence of being permanent, although permanence of marriage is never legislated. Many of the cases of concubinage we do find appear to be of rather long term. Exodus ٢١:٧ directly states that marriage by purchase must be permanent. This is an obvious deterrent to prostitution. The inference is that other .forms of contract exist

Concubinage and polygamy both fell out of use sometime after the return from captivity and during the rise of rabbinicism. As concubinage fell into disuse among the Jews, problems arose. Although there is evidence of prostitution existing alongside marriage and

concubinage, the incidence of prostitution may have increased with the decrease in .polygamy and concubinage

The parts of the Gospel relating to the period before Jesus' ministry reaffirm the validity of the law on marriage. Joseph contemplates divorcing Mary because of her pregnancy before the consummation of the marriage (Matthew ۱:۱۹). This is in consistent harmony with the law. John the Baptist suffered imprisonment and finally execution because he was so severe in maintaining the law against marrying the .(brother's wife (Mark ۶:۱۷

There is no direct divine legislation in the Gospel. With only one or two possible exceptions, the whole body of the text is clearly the witness of others than God. It is also from the point of view of the hierarchy of order subordinate to the Hebrew Scriptures. Since Jesus combined the offices of prophet and divine guide, his words can be taken with the force of holy example or prophetic authority. His acts can be taken with the force of holy example. His words and acts may therefore abrogate .earlier holy example, but can only reaffirm, clarify, or apply direct divine revelation

The contextual concern of the primary commandment itself is no longer in evidence at this point. There is no need to populate the earth, which has already achieved an adequate population. The emphasis moves away from reproduction to evangelism. Rather than giving birth to more believers, the focus moves to the new birth. The primary command ought then to be reinterpreted to include evangelization. The bridge to

this is already seen in the blessings on the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob found in Genesis, by which all nations share in the faith of God. The gospel commission of Matthew ۲۸:۱۸-۲۰ should therefore be seen as the culmination of the first command of .the Bible, the command to reproduce

Nevertheless, the Gospel sheds some light on marital relations and the moral duties relating to them. Matthew ۵:۳۱-۳۲ (Luke ۱۶:۱۸) quotes Deuteronomy ۲۴:۱ in regard to the bill of divorce. This is expanded in the discussion of Matthew ۱۹:۱-۱۲; (Mark ۱۰:۱-۱۲). The story in Matthew ۲۲:۲۳-۳۳ (Mark ۱۲:۱۸-۲۷; Luke ۲۰:۲۷-۳۸) does not refer to marriage .directly, but to the resurrection

This text is generally interpreted to mean that Jesus abrogated the law of divorce for all cases except that of adultery, in which case divorce is permitted. There are two serious problems with this interpretation. The first problem is that Jesus does not have the authority to abrogate the law. He only has authority to reaffirm, clarify and apply it to new or specific situations. The law permits divorce, and even if divorce was given because of the specific situation of the hardness of hearts, Jesus could reapply .it only in the specific situation that hardness of heart no longer existed

The second problem is that the penalty for adultery is death. There is no use in providing for divorce in the case of adultery, because divorce can only be applied to a living person. Only a living person can

be a recipient of the bill of divorce. But the direct result of adultery, that is the death sentence, must take place before a new issue can be raised. Even if the sentence ?could be postponed, what sense is there in divorcing someone only to execute them

This problem disappears when the term`porneia', translated fornication, is rather applied to the list of prohibited marriages in Leviticus ۱۸:۶-۲۰. Divorce would thus be considered appropriate only in the rare case when the marriage at some point was .found to be illegal because of a degree of kinship that had gone unnoticed earlier

If we take Luke ۱۶:۱۸ to be the pure legislation, and the exception in Matthew to be the misguided clarification of a later hand, we are left with an unconditional prohibition of divorce. This is easier to deal with. Without abrogating the general law of divorce, Jesus could make the application of divorce in a specific situation unlawful. The text gives no indication of what that situation might be. We must either assume that the application is specific and limited or, on the basis of the ordered hierarchy of textual .values, reject the text altogether

If there is no indication in the text of what specific situation the prohibition of divorce applies to, we must look for such a situation first in the practice of the society of Jesus, if possible, and then in later societies in the same area. We do not have information on the practice of Jesus' time, but

we do find examples in the area. The law of divorce is used in the Middle East as an alternative to prostitution. That is, marriages are contracted with the intention of divorce after even so short a term as hours. We may safely assume that Jesus is .referring to this practice

The legislation of Matthew ۵:۳۱-۳۲ and Luke ۱۶:۱۸ is of the validity of holy example, since it consists of the words of a prophet and divine guide. It clarifies the valid application to cases in which the hardness of the hearts of a married couple contribute to their inability to live together. It clarifies that marriage with the intention of immediate divorce as an alternative to prostitution results in adultery and is .therefore an invalid use of the law of divorce

Besides the increase of prostitution as such, we are justified in assuming that the present-day practice of marriage with intent to divorce began to appear in first century Judaism, the time and place to which the Gospels refer. This alternative to prostitution is prevalent today in the Middle East and must have been known at the time of Jesus. It is in this context that we should read the Gospel injunctions against .divorce

We can safely assume that Jesus' treatment of marriage with the intent to divorce forms a part of Jesus' legal reform. Jesus rejects rabbinical method as an application of the law. Marriage with intent to divorce is precisely the kind of circumvention that ,rabbinical method allows. Jesus

by contrast, relies on holy example in his application of the law, and sets himself up as .such an example

We do not know the specific application of holy example that Jesus made in regard to concubinage either in his own person or in regard to the holy example of earlier Scripture. In the Gospels as preserved to us, he never discusses the issue of the decrease in polygamy and concubinage. He only condemns what came to replace them, that is, marriage with intent to divorce. The general assumption that Jesus himself was unmarried has only the textual foundation that no wife is specifically .mentioned. It is based on prejudices arising from later Christian ideals of monasticism

Considering Jesus' age and the mores of his time, we could more safely assume that he had one wife. That would be a consistent, modern Jewish assumption. Considering Jesus' authoritative application of the law in contrast to rabbinical method, we could even more safely assume that he could have had more than one wife and concubine. These wives and concubines could be among those mentioned in such texts as Luke ۲۳:۵۵: `And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and '.beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid

The collection of letters appearing after the Gospels, coming where they do, have the least authority of all Scripture. They do not contain the quoted words of God, but rather, human witnesses. At this point, there is little that can be done

but reaffirmation of what has gone on before and limited application to some new situations. We do not have a right to interpret the letters in conflict with the earlier Scripture. The Pauline conflict with the `law' should not be seen as a conflict with Scripture, but with the configuration of rabbinical method for interpreting and implementing it.

1 Corinthians ۵:۱ reaffirms the law against marrying one's father's wife (Leviticus ۱۸:۸ and Deuteronomy ۲۲:۳۰). Verses ۹-۱۳ gives as punishment that the believers should shun the offender altogether. This is in reference to the fact that the believers are living under an ungodly government and are therefore restrained from carrying out the penalties of the law. Chapter six points out the fact that the congregation of believers is lawfully responsible to govern by the law, but is prevented from doing so by an ungodly government which must be taken into practical consideration. Appeal to the authority of such government is forbidden.

1 Corinthians ۷ is a continuation of the Pauline application of the law to the Corinthian church of his day. Verse one states what seems to be a celibate ideal. This should be qualified by several factors. First, as already mentioned, the necessity of replenishing the earth has become a secondary concern, properly supplemented by evangelization. Second, the unstable times were not conducive to family life (1 Corinthians ۷:۲۶,۲۹). This factor appears in Jesus' warning in Matthew ۲۴:۱۹, `woe to them that give suck in those days'. The Pauline letters, inspired and

inspiring as they may be, are written under the prevailing conception of the time. There was an immediate expectation of the second coming of Christ, the tribulation .and the end of the world

Under these conditions, Paul's ideal of celibacy takes on another flavour. He himself .points out that this is a clerical verdict and not a divine one in ۱ Corinthians ۷:۶

With these qualifications, Paul gives specific instruction on how to maintain celibacy and still maintain the demands of the law on marriage and chastity. Marriage overrides celibacy if it conflicts in practice with the law, `for it is better to marry than to burn (with passion)'. ۱ Corinthians ۷:۹. Every effort to avoid divorce is to be made, but divorce is not absolutely forbidden (۱ Corinthians ۷:۱۵). There is nothing in the text .which seems to conflict with the law

The following applications of the law are mentioned specifically in ۱ Corinthians ۷: mutual benevolence between husband and wife, conjugal relations are the duty of both husband and wife, mutual consent to abstain from conjugal relations in order to fast and pray must be temporary, avoid divorce, permit divorce of an unbeliever from .a believer, permit remarriage of the widow

Corinthians ۲ may reflect the result of the rebuke of a man marrying his father's ۲ wife. Paul's advice was to `leave him to Satan' and to shun him completely. Apparently the man repented and separated from the illicit union. There was then argument in the congregation about how to relate

to the man. Paul clarifies a reinstatement and forgiveness as being his position (۲ Corinthians ۲:۶-۱۱). Leviticus ۲۰:۱۱ provides the death sentence for this case. Paul's verdict thus contradicts the law. At this point in history there was a long tradition of Jewish courts. The rabbinical method had already come into its own.

The death sentence in practice was not applied even in the Jewish community. Paul's reversal of verdict from shunning to forgiveness is not only in the context of the man's repentance. It is in the context of the fact that the law does not provide shunning as a punishment for this particular sin, but rather the death sentence. The law does not provide for the substitution of one sentence for another. Therefore Paul's changed verdict has as much validity as the first one.

In Galatians ۵:۱۹ there is a condemnation of adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lasciviousness.

Ephesians ۵:۲۲-۳۳ gives some principles on relations between husbands and wives. Paul appeals for the best of behavior between husband and wife, but bases it on the wife's submission to the husband and the husband's love for the wife. The social equality between husband and dowered wife is unquestioned in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Pauline attitude may show the influence of a chauvinistic society or a cultural drift toward the subordination of women, although his verdict is unimpeachable. The same chauvinistic foundation appears in Colossians ۳:۱۸-۱۹.

Adherence to the law regarding sexual behavior is emphasized in ۱ Thessalonians ۴:۳,۵,۷. In ۱ Timothy ۳:۲ Paul gives

qualifications for an overseer in the congregation, saying he should be the husband of one wife. The same point is made for deacons in verse twelve. This is sometimes understood to imply that more than one wife in succession is meant. If this were the case, however, not only divorce would be prohibited, but also the remarriage of widowers. Although the Jewish practice of monogamy was well established at the time, this was not true for the Greek population. Paul here states that the overseer and deacon must be monogamous. The other side of the coin is that monogamy for .the ordinary member of the congregation is not enjoined

In ۱ Timothy ۴:۳, Paul condemns those who forbid to marry. In ۵:۱۴ he encourages younger women to marry and bear children. ۱ Peter ۳:۱ff agrees with the Pauline verdicts, even to the point of chauvinism, enjoining the submission of wives and the .love of husbands

At this point it is possible to make a general evaluation of the Biblical texts from the point of view of Islamic law. I shall make only some brief remarks on salient features here, not least of all because Islamic law appears in four Sunnite schools of jurisprudence and a multitude of Shi'ite variations. It can be noted first of all that the general point of view of the Biblical legislation is much in the same spirit as that of Islam. Since the Islamic legislation itself is not in agreement on all details, one can hardly find

.complete consistency between it and the Bible legislation

All Islamic schools differ from the Bible in two points. They all limit the number of wives to four, whereas the Bible places no limit on the number of wives. ١ Timothy ٣:٢,١٢ cannot be construed as a general limit for two reasons. It is in reference to a specific class of specialized people, and it comes at such a low level of order and .validity that it cannot even be taken as legislation at all

The other point of difference is a configuration of laws surrounding the brother's wife. Islam permits marriage to the brother's wife (on the death of the brother or in the event of divorce). The Bible does not permit it in general, but in the case of a childless widow commands it. The levirate is also probably associated to the law forbidding travel for war or business during the first year of marriage and during the engagement. This law probably stands in view of reducing the necessity of .implementing the levirate

Although there is no direct legislation on the subject, concubinage is attested by the holy example of Abraham, David and Solomon, among others. Islam generally does not recognize concubinage after the time of the Caliph Omar, although it is accepted by some jurisprudents. The general Sunnite practice is to accept a marriage contract as valid even when it is contracted with the intention of divorce. This alternative to prostitution appears to have been severely condemned by Jesus. Jesus' attitude

.may suggest acceptance of concubinage, however

There are some slight differences in the Bible and Islamic legislations on punishment for sexual crimes, but in the main they are similar. Burning, for example, is unknown as a punishment in Islamic law, except for the active partner in homosexual anal coitus. The same can be said for the similarity between incest laws. The Bible and Islam agree on the number of witnesses for a contract: two males or one male and two females, that is, two or three. But Islam requires four witnesses for adultery, and .there is no provision in Islam, as there is in the Bible, for unwitnessed adultery

In summary, an examination of the whole Bible suggests the following. Concubinage, or limited marriage for pleasure, is mentioned in the Bible in regard to about ten men. It is mentioned, however, in such a way as to indicate that it was a well-known and widespread practice. Its characteristics are therefore not described in detail. There is mentioned only the fact that children of concubinage do not inherit with a man's other children. The Bible does not legislate anything about the time period of marriage, except that marriage by purchase must be permanent. Every example of concubinage in the Bible relates to a devout personage, and more than half of them .relate to men whose holy example had to be followed by the people of their times

The decrease of concubinage and polygamy among the Jews led to an increase in prostitution, and its

alternative, marriage with intent to divorce. The most consistent interpretation of Jesus' opposition to divorce points to this specific practice. The Gospel thus reverts .back to the holy example of the earlier Scriptures

In sum, it appears that in general the Bible accepts polygamy while maintaining monogamy as an ideal. It accepts divorce with reluctance. It also accepts concubinage, or limited marriage. It punishes adultery, prostitution and to some extent premarital relations. It differs from Islam mainly in the practice of the levirate .and in placing no restriction on the number of wives

There are some differences in penalties as well: for example burning in the Bible is the penalty for contracting a marriage with a mother and daughter, whereas in Islam the penalty of burning is reserved only for the active partner in homosexual coitus. Unlike Christianity, both the Bible and Islam, not to mention Judaism, conceive of marriage .as a contract between two persons, not as a sacrament

In the end, we do well to remember Jesus' example of Scriptural interpretation. He states that the beginning is the ideal: one wife, no divorce. All of the legislation after that has taken the hardness of human hearts into consideration. We should all strive for the ideal, and that ideal is the same in all three faiths. Considering that divorce and multiple marriage of some kind are practiced in Islam with less frequency in general than in Western societies, we are justified in believing that Muslims make a true effort to maintain

.both the legislations of Islam and the ideal of monogamy without divorce

The Bible as Islamic Scripture

point

At this point the basic issues of Islam have been examined in the light of the Bible. It is appropriate to change points of view. Rather than beginning with the beliefs and practices of Islam as such, and looking for them in the Bible, it is now time to take the .Bible as it stands, and see how it appears from an Islamic viewpoint

We turn to the examination of a particular Biblical text as a text of Islam. We have already noted that James the brother of Christ is the final Imami figure to appear in the Bible. It is therefore appropriate to look at the epistle attributed to him as we seek .a bridge from the faith of the Bible to historical Islam

The Epistle of James

The epistle of James is a remarkable one. It contains not only a directly developed discourse on the subjects of its choice, but hints and references to all of the major doctrinal issues and to many matters of practice. Some of these are reminiscent of Islamic values, practices, and beliefs, and they will emerge here as special issues as .we go along

The epistle can be seen as a commentary on the prayer of Abraham as it is known to us in a later text, the first chapter of the holy Qur'an. This first part will examine the epistle from this point of view, showing how the author penetrates the meaning of the prayer

with not only theological astuteness, but with an eye continually on the practical side of the life of faith. The epistle of James deals with subjects in order which are reminiscent of the phrases of the first chapter of the Qur'an in the same order of .occurrence

The first chapter of the Qur'an is as follows. It should be remembered that the Qur'an cannot be translated. This is merely an English explanation of the text as rendered by .S.V. Mir Ahmad Ali, The Holy Qur'an, Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, New York, ۱۹۸۸, page ۴

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful, all praise is only God's, the Lord of the worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgement, Thee alone worship we and of Thee only we seek help. Guide us O Lord on the Right path, the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy bounties, not the path of those .inflicted with Thy wrath, nor of those gone astray

In the Name of God ۲ :۱

The Qur'anic phrase identifies the Deity as Allah, God to whom all creation is .submitted

The first thing James does is to establish his identity. He calls himself merely a servant of God. This corresponds precisely to the well-known name Abd Allah, servant of God. This is of primary importance to James. He wants above all to establish his servantship under God. This is understandable if the author is James the just, whose right to the throne of Israel may well have

been accepted by thousands. As an heir to the throne of Israel he writes to the .scattered twelve tribes

.The second point James makes is that he is also the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ

The word theos in Greek corresponds in translation generally to the word Elohim of the Hebrew Scriptures. This word is the cognate of Allah in Arabic. The word kyrios is used to translate the Hebrew YHWH into Greek in the Hebrew Scriptures, but it is also applied to Christ and others in the Greek Scriptures. It seems to have four basic uses in the Greek Scriptures: ۱) as a translation of YHWH, ۲) Master, as of a slave or disciple, ۳) Sir, and ۴) Mister. In this case, the second meaning is preferred, the latter being too weak and the former being excluded by application to one who is a man and .not God

.The import of James's words in all details establishes the one true God

The Beneficent ۱:۲-۱۱

.The Qur'anic expression relates to the broad grace of God in creation as a whole

The word temptation in this section refers to trials, unpleasant events, and suffering in general. It refers to anything that can happen to shake our confidence in God. They are specifically events for which no one can be blamed, and which could not be .changed merely by a change in human behavior

James gives us some counsel on how to relate to such situations. His treatment is firstly to count it joy. This is a conscious

exercise of renewing confidence in God. It is natural when disaster falls to question why. Why did God let it happen? The treatment is not to find an answer to such foolish questioning, for such answers in reality merely lay blame on God. The treatment is to lay such questions aside and renew confidence in God. That is, to count it all joy. The second step is the growth of patience. The third step is perfection.

In the face of the temptation to question why God allows this or that, as though disasters were personal messages from God, James gives us some advice on how to pray and what to pray for in such situations. He approaches this problem in verses ۵-۸. The first point is how to pray: that is, in faith or nothing wavering. We are to pray without doubting God. To question why God allows this or that is in itself doubting, not healthy doubting, but lack of confidence. The second point is what to pray for, which is wisdom. In difficulty we are to pray for wisdom, which is the ability to know the will of God even when we find ourselves in extraordinary circumstances, at times when we might be off guard. To pray for wealth, as is so popular nowadays, is not appropriate.

James's commentary defines some of the practical aspects of the broad grace of God which could be misunderstood.

The Merciful ۱:۱۲-۲۷

The word `Merciful' refers to the particular grace or mercy of God in a

.specific case, time and individual

At this point James enters another area. He even redefines the word temptation altogether. At this point he begins talking about temptation to sin, which is something altogether different. He did not tell us, for example, the source of the temptation he examined up to here. But beginning from verse twelve he talks about the temptation which has its source in lust, as the authorized King James Version of the Bible puts it. The meaning of the word temptation in verses ۱۲-۲۷ is the desire or attraction to do .other than the expressed will of God

James makes two points about temptation of this kind. First of all, those who endure under it, will receive a reward. Secondly, we are not to suggest that God is the source of such temptation. This is not, of course, to imply that God is the source of the former kind of trial either. But James gives a four-step development: ۱) lust, which produces .۲) enticement, which produces ۳) sin, which produces ۴) death

Each of these steps can be examined more closely. The first, lust, is at the level of what each of us is. This can refer to natural, normal drives which have the potential of being directed toward inappropriate objects, or it can refer to abnormal and acquired drives, such as addiction. The second step is enticement, or the moment when a drive .becomes conscious and is directed toward a specific goal at a specific moment

This is the

point at which the temptation enters our consciousness. This is the point at which it is too late to pray, `Lead us not into temptation,' since at that point we are already in temptation. The third step, sin, is the point at which the choice is made to carry out the illicit desire and the act itself takes place. In contrast with what many Christians teach, sin is not a mental disposition or something inborn, such as original sin, but rather the act of transgressing the law. The final step is death, which is primarily the condition in .which right knowledge of God is no longer active

The rest of the section deals with how we can overcome temptation. James's theory could be called salvation by the action of the word of truth. The word of truth is intro… duced in verses ۱۷-۲۱. The word of truth is described in four points. The first point is that God is the source of all good things. The second is that God does not change. When we realize these two things, then the word of truth can put us into a special covenant relationship with God. This covenant relationship produces the potential for .a certain kind of behavior as described in verses ۱۹-۲۱

Verses ۲۲-۲۵ describe the process of how the word of truth works. This process involves decided action, not merely intellectual comprehension. The first step is illustrated with the mirror. Just as one can look in the mirror to discover facial blemishes, one

can look into the ten commandments to discover blemishes in behavior. This is an actual practice that has to be done decidedly and consciously. Each of the .commandments should be read or recited

After each one, we should think back over our behavior and decide what needed improvement we become aware of in the light of the commandment. The next phase is to make a decision to act accordingly, that is, to continue in the commandment. The important point is the decision. There will often be a temptation not to make the decision to obey, because we know that we have failed to do so in the past. Failure in .obedience, however, does not free us from the obligation to decide to obey

James gives three areas of attention while looking into the mirror of the law. These are found in ۱:۲۶-۲۷. The first area of attention is what and how you speak. The second area of attention is how you have related to the weak, the poor, and the oppressed. The third area focuses on the matter of conformity and nonconformity. To practice the mirror of the law should free us from conformity to the mores of the surrounding society. We certainly receive outside influences, but we ought to limit these and let the law influence us as much as possible. So these three areas include speech, action, .and attitude or thinking

James's shift from the temptation inherent in creation to the particular temptation to sin as it appears in the

individual parallels the shift in the Qur'anic phrase from general grace to particular .mercy

All Praise is only God's ۲:۱-۴

The Qur'anic phrase recognizes that all good things, even those received at the hand of human beings, have their true source in God, to whom is therefore due all thanks .and praise in the final analysis

The desire for credit and inordinate praise is the source of the social system of subservience to the wealthy and disdain for the poor. Although this is true in every time and place, the society in which we now live is almost unique in having only one criterion for respect: money. It has come to the point that faith and spirituality are part and parcel of the materialist culture. We strike directly against this corrupt way .when we recognize that all praise is God's

On the other hand, there is a way of relating to others in terms of moderate, deserved praise, that enhances human relations and feeds the healthy tone of self-esteem. After all, even the things for which we wrongly demand credit and inordinate praise, are things for which the praise is due to God. We are therefore daily dealing in divine .actions and are creatures of finer stuff than we imagine

James's commentary applies the Qur'anic phrase to very practical situations in which .humans misunderstand and misappropriate to themselves praise due to God

The Lord of the Worlds ۲:۵-۹

The Qur'anic phrase recognizes God's sovereignty over all things by virtue of .creatorship

To give respect to one human being

over another on the basis of their wealth is idolatry. Such respect belongs to God. He is the source and true owner of all things. The way to overcome this false perception is the practice of loving one's neighbor as oneself. This does not mean affection. It .means to take consideration of every person equally in the struggle for survival

James's understanding of the Qur'anic principle allows him to point out that status .based on wealth is empty, since all things finally belong to God

The Beneficent ٢:١٠-١٢

.The Qur'anic phrase of general grace is repeated

To love one's neighbor as oneself is known as the royal law. Here James mentions another law, the law of liberty. Two examples from the law of liberty are given in verse eleven identifying this law as the ten commandments. The ten commandments, being the unique, direct revelation of God, are the general terms of divine grace. That .is why the term ` law of liberty' is so appropriate

James uses this term to combat the antinomian elements in the early community of the followers of Jesus. It is worth noting that the antinomian trend finally took over .what became established Christianity, which is now a non Biblical tradition

The Bible tradition maintains that liberty is specifically defined by the ten commandments, and that the law is identical with grace. Salvation from sin and condemnation is therefore based entirely on grace which extended to those whose .intention is to keep the law and who repent on their failure to do so

Established

Christianity, by contrast, teaches that there is a contrast between freedom or liberty on one hand and the ten commandments on the other. Christians do not see the commandments as liberating, but as binding and onerous. Christianity further maintains that there is a contrast between the ten commandments and grace, and that grace comes after the commandments and abrogates them. Salvation from sin and condemnation according to Christianity is based on confession of acceptance of .the vicarious death of Christ in payment for the debt of sin

The Christian doctrine does not therefore recognize the infinite grace of God in salvation, since it makes a human sacrifice in addition to it necessary. James does not know of any forgiveness of sin on the basis of the crucifixion. That is why, in order to maintain the agreement between the Gospels and James on one hand, and some epistles on the other, it is necessary to understand the application of sacrificial .language to the crucifixion as entirely allegorical

James's analysis of law shows the divine law to be of the character of general grace, .just as the Qur'anic phrase would make it out to be

The Merciful ۲:۱۳-۲۶

.The Qur'anic phrase of particular merciful application is repeated

Grace is within the domain of the basis or justification for salvation. Mercy is within the domain of the individual application of the gift of salvation. James maintains the same .condition for forgiveness in verse thirteen that Jesus maintains in Matthew ۶:۱۴-۱۵

That condition is mercy or the willingness

to forgive. Only those willing to forgive are forgiven. Neither Jesus nor James maintain that forgiveness is conditional on the death of Christ. James expands on this to show that practical deeds of mercy are the real criteria, not a mere oral acknowledgement .of someone's apology for having caused harm

James's doctrine of salvation can thus be summarized in terms of grace and mercy. From the divine direction, acquittal in the judgement depends on the grace of God extended to all people in the ten commandments, appropriated to each individual through mercy. From the human direction, acquittal in the judgement depends on the human acknowledgement of divine grace, that is, conscious assent to the will of God in the form of obedience and repentance, and the merciful demonstration of the .appropriation of grace by works of charity and mercy

The Christian abhorrence of works as a means of salvation is based on the fallacy that human merit somehow arises from the human resources, the fallacy that human action may have some other source than what determines and conditions. This is precisely the fallacy that James is attacking in the first part of the chapter, where he .maintains that all praise belongs to God, who is the Lord of the Universe

Of course the Christian is right, that human merits, supposing such existed, can have no effect on the divine judgement. But divine merits can and do have such an effect. Recognizing that the praise for any good thing belongs to God is

recognizing the divine merit in all things good. We are to choose the works of God, allowing the works of God to be manifest in our lives. Liberty lies not in the power to choose or not to choose the works of God, as many would maintain, but in choosing the works of God. Liberty appears only when the choice has been made. We are .otherwise determined and conditioned, possessed of nothing of merit

From the general law, James turns to its specific application in terms of mercy, thus .following a similar pattern to that of the Qur'anic exposition

Master of the Day of judgement ۳:۱-۸

The Qur'anic expression implies that only God is the judge on the Day of Judgement. The implication of course is that there will be such a return of all creation before the .Creator to be held accountable

The surface information here notes the following points: ۱) High position entails greater responsibility; ۲) A person in high position cannot fail to offend at least some of those under him all of the time, and all of those under him some of the time; ۳) To be able not to offend in one's speech would mean that a person is perfect; ۴) The .tongue will condemn us in judgement

All of these practical bits of advice fit together in terms of the theme that God is the Master of the Day of judgement. This should be kept in mind by the person seeking a position of power and influence. Such power

is illusory, first of all, because God alone is Master of the Day of Judgement, and the Day of judgement is not merely a future event, but a mirror casting responsibility back .on our daily lives

The position of power and influence is illusory also because of the character of speech situations. The very essence of authority is offensive to all who come under such .'authority. So those in positions of power ` in many things... offend all

Finally, the position of power is illusory because the tongue undermines it. Anything such a person says to a subordinate, no matter how conciliatory, only serves to condemn the powerful person. This is true in daily confrontations, but it is true of the Day of judgement as well. The tongue confesses the faults of its owner despite the .will to bridle it and put forward the matter in the light most favorable to the individual

James's use of the tongue to comment on the principle of the sovereignty of God is .most ingenious, indeed, again showing the mark of inspiration

James's analysis points out the psychology of trying to usurp judgement with belongs only to God, thus again falling in line with the argument in the first chapter of the .Qur'an

Thee Alone Worship We ۳:۹-۱۲

.The Qur'anic phrase implies the unity of God, to whom alone worship is due

James notes that it is inconsistent to praise God on one hand, and curse human .beings on the other. His argument is based on the unity of the human person

The

prayer expresses the confession of the unity of God in absolute and beautiful terms. James comments on this prayer by showing that it is inconsistent to praise the one true God in His unity and at the same time curse other human beings. The implication is that by dividing humanity we divide divinity as well, thus committing the sin of .` shirk' or association of other beings with God

And of Thee Alone We Seek Help ۳:۱۳-۱۸

The Qur'anic expression affirms the unity of God again by noting that He alone is .capable of giving help in the final analysis

The gist of James's text here is that all wisdom and knowledge coming from God alone, work toward good actions. Failure to recognize this results in contention, .competition and bitterness

James has already shown in chapter one that the right petition is the petition for wisdom. Here he contrasts the petition of selfishness with the petition of wisdom, defining each in more precise terms. The lesson is that we should examine our petitions in order to ascertain whether or not they are conducive to envy and strife. It is obvious, at least in most neighborhoods, that to petition God for a pink Cadillac is asking for envy and strife. The wisdom from above, the right petition, is beautifully .described in verses seventeen and eighteen, with an emphasis on peace

James's analysis is that prayer addressed to the one true God will petition such things .as are in harmony with God's unity

Guide Us, O Lord, on ۴:۱-۶

the Right Path

The Qur'anic petition for guidance on the right path is more than it seems as such. It follows on the reference to the Day of judgement and thus implies a petition in .reference to that event

James notes that strife arises not only from dependence on others than God, but from lust, which appears as competitive envy and sexual misconduct. He thus gives a .practical exposition of the right path

The direct application of the straight path to the trial on the Day of Judgement obscures the fact that the petition is precisely for divine guidance in our daily decisions now. The two points of difficulty in determining the straight path are conflict and sexual misconduct. We humans have the tendency to fall off the Sirator the straight path, either through conflict and separation from other humans, or through too close relations with inappropriate partners. In other words, James chooses not .only the most troublesome examples, but the two ends of the continuum

The source of both problems, according to James, is found in lust. On the one hand, lust for wealth and power causes envy, conflict and war. On the other hand, lust causes adultery. The commandment principle is that sexual relations can take place only within the marriage contract. A man has not the right to relations with the wife of another man, nor does a woman have the right to relations with a man other than one .contracted to her in marriage

James's analysis is again practical, pointing out

.areas of difficulty in daily life which are particularly relevant to the final judgement

The Path of Those upon Whom Thou Hast Bestowed Thy Bounties ۴:۷-۱۰

The mention of `bounties' in prayer brings up in most people visions of material abundance and having fun. This general understanding was harshly criticized by Ja’far ibn Muhammad As-Sadiq, the sixth Shiite Imam, in his answer to Abu Hanifa, founder of the Hanafi school of Sunni jurisprudence. He maintained that the bounties of God are three things: ۱) the knowledge of the unity of God, ۲) the revelation through the prophets, and ۳) divine guidance in the flesh through those specifically sent by .God

His illustration for the fact that the bounties are not material things is from human behavior in hospitality. What would we think of a host, who, after giving food and drink, demanded something in return? Therefore, the bounties our use of which God inquires about in the judgement are not food and drink, but spiritual gifts. Note the story in S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali, The Holy Qur'an, Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, NewYork, ۱۹۸۸, .page ۱۹۰۱

The bounties (grace) are mentioned in verse six, and expanded upon in verses ۷-۱۰. James finds the bounties to be God's lifting us up after submission to God, resisting the devil, drawing near to God, cleansing oneself, purifying the heart, affliction, mourning and weeping, and humbling oneself to God. These are in fact stepping stones to grace or the bounties. The state of grace is called being lifted up

by God (verse ten). This implies continued dependence on God, being held in His .power

Not the Path of those Inflicted with Thy Wrath ۴:۱۱-۱۷

Two categories of the wrong way are given in the prayer, those who incur wrath and those who go astray. The former is often applied to Judaism and the latter to Christi… anity. Indeed, Muslims sometimes perceive rabbinical method as a legal means of circumventing the law. It is particularly this mindset that is condemned here. Again, so typical of James, it is placed in the thoroughly practical. James calls speaking evil of one's brother setting oneself up as a judge of the law. In verse twelve, James relegates this to `shirk' as well, saying that it amounts to associating oneself with God. James's cure for this ill is to recognize human limitations on one hand, and the .human responsibility to obey or submit to God on the other

Nor of Those Gone Astray ۵:۱-۲۰

James here describes the judgement on those who maintain an intellectual faith, but do not carry out the practice of the law, especially in the matters of justice for the .poor and deprived

In contrast with Jews, who do not depart from the law, Christianity, especially in its Protestant forms, departs from the law wholesale, and even prides itself in doing so. This last chapter speaks specifically to the problems that a Muslim observer might perceive in Christianity. Lack of emphasis on the law was already appearing in embryo .at the time of James

The first message

is one of condemnation and judgement (verses ۱-۳). Then there is a list of typical ways of going astray: (verse four) defrauding laborers of salary, (verse five) materialism or wantonness; (verse six) intolerance and persecution of dissenters. This seems almost prophetic of what really happened in three successive phases in the history of .Christianity

The Donation of Constantine is perhaps the most famous example of early Christian fraudulent grasping of power and authority. In time the Church became wealthy and some of its functionaries wanton. This was one of the contributing factors to the Reformation in the West. The fragmentation of Western Christianity, however, did not so much solve the problem of wealth and wantonness as expose the problem of .intolerance and persecution

Verses ۷-۱۱ call for patience and reliance on the coming day of Judgement for redress .in the face of such excesses

Verse ۱۲-۱۶ give practices specifically appropriate to the situation of lowered regard for the law. These practices, according to James, will guard and keep the faithful until the Day of Judgement. These are: ۱) avoidance of oaths, ۲) prayer in affliction, ۳) the singing of Biblical Psalms in place of other entertainment, ۴) anointing and prayer for .the sick, S) confession of faults to one another

A Look at the Message

The message that James is trying to get across has been found by an ordered study of his epistle from beginning to end. It is possible to look at the epistle in another way. In dealing with his subject, James lets slip in

many beliefs and practices that he uses as illustrations or to support his arguments. Although these are not the main presentation of James, they reveal the contours of the faith which he professes and assumes. We can note some of these in this second .reading of the epistle

The first principle of belief that appears is the unity of God. James comes down very firmly on the unity of God. This begins in ۱:۱۷, where James makes the assertion that God, or `the Father of lights', as he puts it, does not change. The changelessness of God has very important theological ramifications. There is hardly any expression in the Bible that more clearly supports the idea of God's absoluteness than this. Changelessness is inconsistent with the concept of a god who incarnates, moves in time and space, eats, sleeps, breathes, dies, resurrects, or bears offspring, since all of .these activities entail change

In ۲:۱۹ James takes issue with the belief that confession of the unity of God is sufficient for salvation. This is a belief that is current among a certain quarter of Muslims today. James's position is that, although such a confession is the first pillar of belief, still it is not in itself sufficient for salvation. Taking the narrow view of the confession of the unity of God, it is only natural that James would reject this easy, .inactive road

Interestingly enough, the attitude that James condemns here is not the faith-without-,works position known in Christianity, something unknown to him

but an attitude in the early church which is much closer to something cropping up today in some Islamic circles, the magnification of the confession of the unity of God to the detriment of the other pillars of practice. One occasionally finds a Muslim who considers that the Shahadatanor confession of the unity of God and the apostlehood of the prophet suffice without carrying out the points of practice in prayer, fasting, .and so on

The unity of God is reiterated in ۴:۱۲, where James says that there is but one lawgiver .in reference to God

The justice of God is an underlying understanding in the epistle. In ۱:۱۳ James takes a clear position that God does no evil. James rejects the stand that God can be arbitrary in judgement. In ۴:۱۲ James supports his view by noting God to be a lawgiver, on the basis of which He is able injustice to save and destroy. Finally, he implies in ۵:۹ that .God's judgement based on behavior is not only sure but impartial, therefore just

The epistle of James is strongly based on the prophetic tradition. The principle is overtly stated in ۵:۱۰. `Take the prophets for an example.' The sequence of prophets upon which he bases his line of thought is as follows: Abraham (۲:۲۱-۲۳), job (۵:۱۱), and .(Elijah (۵:۱۷-۱۸

The idea that the verbal law or revelation must be supplemented by a divine revelation in real flesh and observable actions is only a logical corollary to James's practical emphasis of works that

demonstrate faith. The principle is clearly seen in such texts as ۲:۱, where Jesus is .'referred to as `of glory' and ۱:۱۷ where God is referred to as the `father of lights

The somewhat obscure wording `every good gift and every perfect gift' becomes clear in this context, if it refers to the bounty of divine proof. An idea which is historically and theologically close to the messianic promise and the concept of divine guidance in the flesh, is the idea of the perfect man. This appears in ۱:۴ and ۳:۲. This belief is often coupled with the veneration of the human face, or person. This .extension is found throughout the spirit of the epistle, but especially in ۳:۹ and ۴:۱۱

Finally the belief in the Day of judgement is strongly implied throughout the epistle .and often mentioned outright, as in ۵:۱-۳,۹

Besides beliefs, a number of religious practices are mentioned. Prayer (note ۵:۱۳,۱۶) is mentioned and with it presumably ablutions (۴:۸). The fasting of the Day of Atonement is probably referred to in ۴:۹, and is reminiscent of how many Muslims celebrate the same date in Muharrem. The giving of alms is central to the epistle, but mentioned .especially in ۱:۲۷ and ۲:۱۵-۱۶

Some liturgical formulas and religious expressions of speech occur in the epistle. The Islamic `Depart in peace' (۲:۱۶) and `If the Lord will' (۴:۱۵) are complemented by the Jewish prayer formula 'Baruch atta Adonai' (Blessed art Thou, O Lord) in (۳:۹). The phrase `God most gracious, ever merciful' of

.the Qur'an of course has its roots in the Torah. It is paraphrased here in ۵:۱۱

There seems to be one point above all others that lends a sectarian character to this book, which could otherwise be within the mainstream of Islam or Judaism. That is the prohibition of swearing (۵:۱۲). This could be an echo of the teaching of Jesus, .already referred to earlier, which was a prohibition of the misuse of swearing

The final chapter of James mentions a number of religious practices which have been preserved in Christian tradition probably to a great extent because they are mentioned here. Among these are anointing and prayer for the sick by the elders of .(the church (۵:۱۴), and the practice of the confessional (۵:۱۶

It is extremely doubtful that either of these at the time of James appeared in so .institutionalized a form as they do today in Christianity

Their appearance in Islam is probably closer to the spirit of the text. On the other hand, in all likelihood the singing of Psalms was an intensely institutionalized practice in the early church while Christians and even Jews have more or less lost Psalm singing as an institution today. Although the Psalms are sometimes mentioned in connection with the life of Muhammad in Islamic tradition, their liturgical use has .practically disappeared

The Epistle of James would be a good place to start in a dialogue among the three great faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Bible as a whole has a very

profound core of consistency. If all would lay aside their traditional innovations and return to the Bible text, we might see the frontiers of conflict among Christianity, Judaism and Islam disappear. The heart core of all the revealed faiths is the one true .God

Negative Considerations

An examination of the Christian scriptures from an Islamic point of view has, as a side issue, thrown grave doubts on the Biblical roots of such Christian doctrines as the Trinity, the deity of Jesus, and his death on the cross as an atoning, vicarious sacrifice .for sin. At this point I shall try to do the same for Islam

Are there portions of the Bible which conflict with the teachings and practices of ?Islam

It is clear by now that the basic teachings of Islam can be justified on the basis of the Bible as easily as the doctrines of Christianity, perhaps more easily and convincingly. But there may be Biblical texts which conflict with the texts we have examined and thus with Islam as well. Furthermore, there may be Biblical practices which are unknown to Islam. Finally, there may be Islamic practices we have not mentioned .which conflict with the Bible. Let us take up these three subjects in order

The foremost body of texts causing problems for the Muslim reader are those referring to the crucifixion of Jesus. Islam denies the death of Jesus because it cannot accept any human sacrifice for sin. The Islamic understanding of forgiveness is that it is made

on the basis of divine grace and repentance. No sacrifice can add to divine grace nor replace the necessity of repentance. The Muslim sees the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to detract both from infinite divine grace and human responsibility in repen-.tance

Rather than dealing with the issue directly, there has been a tendency in Islam to deny the death of Jesus out right, and thus avoid the issue altogether. There can hardly be a sacrifice on the cross if Jesus never died. There are two explanations in .Islam

The majority explanation, taken from the Gospel of Barnabas, is that there was a substitute on the cross, who miraculously seemed to take on the appearance of Jesus. The minority explanation is the so-called swoon theory, by which Jesus was on the cross, but did not die. He merely swooned and revived in the tomb. In general Muslims do not deny the ascension or the second coming of Jesus at the end of the world. They differ from Christians, however, in making his activities at that future time somewhat subordinate to the awaited Islamic figure of the Mahdi. Many Muslims believe that the main reason for Jesus' second coming is so that he will have a chance .to die as all men must

It is almost undeniable that the New Testament teaches the death and resurrection of Jesus. A case has been made for the swoon theory, but it has to presume that the disciples and gospel writers were then ignorant of

.the true facts

There are several references to the death or removal of Jesus in the Qur'an, but all are subject to various interpretations. Q۳:۵۴ `Recall when God said: O Jesus, I will take thee away and lift thee up unto Me...' The margin reads `complete thy term'. It is not at all clear what the Qur'an means to have happened to Jesus at the end of his life on earth and before his resurrection. Q۴:۱۵۷ `And for their saying (in boast) "Verily we have slain the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Apostle of God;" But they slew him not, and they crucified him not, but (it) became dubious unto them; and indeed those who differ therein are only in doubt about it, they have no knowledge about the (real) matter, pursuing (only) a conjecture; and certainly, they slew him not.' In Q۱۹:۳۳ Jesus is said to have prophesied of himself miraculously in the cradle, `And peace be on me '.the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am raised alive

The Christian will immediately see Jesus' words about his birth, death, and ascension as completely in accordance with the Gospel birth, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, and wonder why the Muslim interprets them in terms of a disappearance .without death and a return to die some millennia later

The text on the crucifixion is generally interpreted to deny the death of Jesus, rather than to deny that it was the boasting Jews who killed him. Either

interpretation is possible, and both have problems. The context of the verse is clearly within the discussion of Jewish ridicule of Christians, not in context of whether or not .Jesus died

On the other hand, the expressions against the crucifixion are strong, so that to interpret the meaning for Romans rather than Jews to have committed the act is also suspect. If the latter meaning is correct, it would have been more effective to state that the Romans killed Jesus, rather than to emphasize that the Jews were not in possession of the facts. If the interpreter desires to reconcile the Qur'an and the Gospel narrative however, the only way of doing so is to understand that the Qur'anic .text refers to the Romans having killed Jesus instead of the Jews

Most Muslims will certainly prefer to keep their belief that Jesus was not crucified, and consider the Bible corrupted on that point. For those desiring to meet Christians on a .more congenial footing, another interpretation is possible

A more difficult problem for Muslims is the Bible practice of describing God in anthropomorphic terms. The Hebrew Scriptures are especially filled with such passages and the translations into Arabic do nothing to mitigate the problem. Muslims reading the Arabic Bible thus get a stronger impression of anthropomorphism than is .found in the Hebrew

An example is Genesis ۶:۶. `And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.' The Christian will likely feel comforted

by the idea of God grieving for humankind. The Muslim will focus on the problem of God regretting having made man. The Muslim will note that the text does not take divine foreknowledge into consideration, nor God's unchangeability. Some Muslims .might also be offended by attribution of grief to God

Another example is Exodus ۳۱:۱۷. `It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.' The Qur'anic references to the same event speak not of resting on the seventh day, but of ascending the throne. The Muslim finds the idea of God needing rest in the first place offensive, and to add to this that God was `refreshed' is outright repulsive. The Christian, on the other hand, may find such .expressions comforting in bringing God closer to human experience

It is likely that both Muslims and Christians do the text an injustice by judging it from criteria foreign to it. The ancient Hebrew language is extremely poor in expressions indicating the distinction between concrete and abstract. Thus words are used in .Hebrew with both an abstract and concrete meaning

By contrast, the Arabic language is very precise in making such distinctions. It is easy to misconstrue the Hebrew meaning of words by giving them concrete connotations where such did not exist at the time of writing. Thus both Muslims and Christians should adjust their thinking. Christians should realize that

the Hebrew text is more foreign to their thinking than they presume in drawing .anthropomorphic conclusions

Muslims should realize that the Hebrew does not have the precision of the Arabic and expresses the same concepts of God as they are acquainted with in language as appropriate to them as the ancient Hebrew allows. It may be unfortunate that abstract thought was not so well expressed in ancient Hebrew as it was in medieval Arabic, but that is a fact that has to be accepted. Muslims have the advantage over .Christians in that the Qur'an can prevent errors of misunderstanding the Hebrew text

Christians must face not only the linguistic and cultural differences of the text, but overcome centuries of prejudice in favor of non Biblical doctrines, such as the Trinity, .the deity of Jesus, and the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus in atonement for sin

Besides what seems to be anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Bible, Muslims often face difficulty with narratives of the prophets. Bible stories often tell events offensive to Muslims especially regarding sin on the part of prophets. Although some of these can be understood as translation problems, there remains a residue of truly .difficult passages

In the chapter on marriage it was noted that the story of David and Bathsheba can be interpreted more to David's favor by merely translating the word `wife' as `betrothed wife'. With that, the accusations of both murder and adultery fall, and David remains with a lesser fault. In the same chapter Judah's

behavior with Tamar was seen to relieve him of charges of prostitution by the .application of a marriage contract

Among the residue of truly difficult passages there are the stories of Noah and Lot. In Genesis ۹:۲۰-۲۹, Noah runs into trouble for being drunk. Even if we go so far as to say that the intoxication was unintentional, the Muslim will always note that a prophet should be protected from such involvements. The story of Lot and his two daughters goes beyond mere drunkenness to incest. Although the text makes it clear that Lot is .not responsible, the story remains a sordid narrative from the Islamic viewpoint

Islamic explanations of these texts generally turn on the issue of Bible corruption. The Muslim will see these texts as malicious additions to the Bible. Many Christians have become accustomed to historical criticism and do not find this a problem. Muslims .may consider corruption of one passage to defile the whole

Such stories seem to have no other explanation but corruption of the text, a cultural source no longer understandable, or an allegorical interpretation. None of these is very convincing. At this point it might be useful for Muslims to learn a new attitude .from Christians. It is possible to relate to a mutilated text in terms of its usefulness

Muslims relate to the Qur'an in a way incomprehensible to Christians, some of whom see the Bible as hardly more than a historical witness of questionable reliability. It would be possible for Muslims to see the

Bible as an imperfect witness of truth that is perfectly expressed in the Qur'an. Even if we possessed the earlier books in their original and uncorrupted form, if they had ?been perfect, what need would there have been for the Qur'an

The story of Lot brings us to another problem with the Bible text, the problem of pornographic description. Much of the problem here lies in Muslim prudery which defines pornography in different terms than those used when the Bible was written. Muslims are able to discuss legal matters in detail. It is the matter of narrative which is .offensive

This problem could be largely offset in Muslim eyes if Muslims understood that narrative has a different function in the Bible than it does in the Qur'an. There is very little narrative in the Qur'an, while much of the Bible is narrative in nature. Bible narrative is legislatively purposeful even when it is not directly stated to be so. What is considered by Muslims to be pornographic narrative can generally be classed in one .of two categories

The first is legislative condemnation of such acts by implication. The second type is prophetic denouncement using pornographic figures. Prostitution is one of the most common Biblical figures for idolatry. It is not a great leap for Muslim sensibilities to realize that sexual unfaithfulness is an apt figure for the atrocious character of shirk, .that is, association of false gods with God

The final textual problem of the Bible is that of alcohol. Muslims generally

believe that the prohibition of alcohol came only at the time of the Qur'anic revelation. They do believe, however, that none of the early prophets used alcohol. Most Muslims see the Qur'an as giving a progressive and ever more strict prohibition of alcohol. Some even deny that alcohol is actually prohibited in the Qur'an. The Bible is even .more ambiguous on this point

There are Biblical texts condoning wine for medicinal purposes, most notably ١ Timothy ٥:٢٣. `Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.' But the Biblical approach to alcohol does not end there. There are some Christians who maintain that the Bible condemns the non-medicinal use of alcohol completely, and it is certainly true that the Bible consistently condemns drunkenness. From the historical critical point of view, one of the earliest Biblical texts condemns drunkenness (١ Samuel ١:١۴). So there is a clear limitation on alcohol from .the earliest times

One of the best-known of Biblical condemnations of drunkenness is Proverbs ٢٠:١. `wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not '.wise

But it is one of the Torah texts that causes the most problems, Deuteronomy ١۴:٢۶. And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household.' There

is not a problem with the word wine, which does not differentiate between fermented .and unfermented

Thus all of the texts speaking positively about wine in both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures may be interpreted as referring to unfermented wine. The word `sheker'or strong drink is another matter, and it is easily recognized by the Muslim who knows the Qur'anic language as well. It is inescapably alcoholic and intoxicating. The problem is magnified by the fact that it is described here as appropriate to the worship .activities of the pilgrimage itself

Of the Biblical practices unknown to Islam, we have already mentioned the levirate. Most Biblical practices seemingly unknown to Islam are contained within the priestly ministrations of the ancient Hebrew temple service. Besides those there are the .annual festivals described in the Torah, and the weekly Sabbath

Of these practices, rabbinical Judaism follows in some sense all but the priestly, temple services. The rationale for not following these is that the temple was destroyed in the seventh decade of the first century AD, so there are no longer the requisite facilities for doing so. Apparently the only priestly function preserved in .modem Judaism is the receipt of the redemption money for the first-born

Of these practices, Christianity in general follows almost none. There are only quaint exceptions, such as the Lutheran requisite that a priest in the church not be disabled according to the priestly descriptions in the Torah. There are some exceptions as well on the peripheries of Christianity, such as

the animal sacrifices of the Armenian Christians, and the Sabbath-observance of the .Ethiopian Coptic Christians and some others

The Christian rationale for neglecting these is that the law came to an end in the Messiah and is no longer valid. As I have pointed out, this is an inconsistent rationale, since Christians apparently continued to participate in the temple sacrifices for a generation after the death of Jesus which was supposed to put them to an end. Christians generally place all of these features, temple worship, annual festivals, and the weekly Sabbath into the one category of ceremonial law which was a shadow of .things to come, that is, of Jesus the Messiah

Temple practice seems to have contained the possibility for change. There is certainly a striking difference between the temple service described in Leviticus and that described in the last chapters of Ezekiel. There are also essential differences between .Leviticus and Deuteronomy

It is very likely that these differences reflect differences from one time period to another, differences in practice from one place to another at the same time, and differences based on the verdicts of different divinely appointed representatives at different times. Thus the Biblical revelation can be considered to represent a variety .of temple practices without necessarily being inconsistent

Such variation in practice can be seen for the annual festivals as well. The list in Numbers twenty-eight and twenty-nine does not mention the specific pilgrimage festival at all, while Deuteronomy twelve seems to focus entirely upon it. The

structure of the Psalms includes all of them. Christianity has rejected all of them on the basis of a symbolic interpretation, and replaced them with extrabiblical festivals originating in the local religions of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Judaism follows the sequence in Numbers, neglects the pilgrimage, and adds some festivals .from a post-Biblical period

Although Islam cannot be seen to follow temple procedures and annual festivals exactly, it can be seen to be well within the same field of variation and viewpoint. An emphasis of the Deuteronomic pilgrimage to the detriment of some of the festivals of Numbers twenty-eight and twenty-nine is certainly as justifiable as the Jewish .practice, which neglects the pilgrimage festival

Among the Biblical festivals only one is not represented in some way in Islamic practice, and that is the festival of Tabernacles or Succoth. Otherwise, Ramadhan corresponds in time and spirit with Pentecost, Muharrem with the feast of trumpets and the day of atonement, and the widespread practice of fasting in the seventh month with Passover. The differences in observance are largely within the variation .already noted for the Bible itself

The Sabbath is another problem. Historically, the three great traditions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism have had their representative days, Jumu'a (Friday), Sabbath, and Sunday. A careful examination of the Bible text reveals the most astounding fact. All three traditions depart from the Bible and perhaps even the Qur'an in their practice. The Bible and possibly the Qur'an supports the marking of two days

of the week with special regard, Friday and Sabbath or Saturday. There is little evidence for any Sunday observance in the Bible at all, and what there is depends .heavily on the weight of post-Biblical centuries of practice to give it any force

It might be best to look at some detail in this matter since both Muslims and Christians will be justifiably skeptical of my conclusions. The Bible begins with the creation story in Genesis ۱:۱-۲:۳. The structure of the story suggests that one of its major functions is the justification of the week. The seven days of creation are each given their own character by the things purported to have been created on them, but the sixth and seventh day are especially marked. The sixth day is said to be the day on which human beings were created, blessed, given the power to reproduce, given dominion, and the right to food. The seventh day is also set apart from all others by the fact that .it was the only day that was blessed by God

The same configuration of a special blessing on the Sabbath day, preceded by a special blessing on humankind on the preceding day continues throughout the Bible. Note, for example, Exodus sixteen, in which the days of the week are again divided into three groups. There are the days on which manna comes in the morning, is sufficient for that one day, and spoils if kept over. These are the first to fifth days of the

week, Sunday to Thursday. On Friday a double portion of manna comes, and this manna can be kept over without spoiling. On Saturday or the Sabbath no manna comes and the blessing of Friday feeds the population, thus showing all to be .dependent on God

Most of the Sabbath regulations in the Torah reflect this concern of providing a double portion of food on Friday, and avoiding food-getting or preparing activities on the Sabbath. The other writings expand on this to some extent, but add little of a new nature. Everything relates to the Friday blessing of food and the Sabbath enjoyment of that double portion and avoidance of food-getting on that day. The thrust of the cycle thus focuses on human dependence on God for sustenance and represents it .literally and specifically in the Friday and Sabbath experience

The Sabbath is mentioned in the Qur'an several times. Q۲:۶۵,۶۶ `And indeed ye know of those amongst you who transgressed on the Sabbath, so We said unto them, "Be ye apes, despised and spurned!" So We made it a lesson for (those of) their own times and for those (of their posterity) who came after them and an exhortation unto those who guard (themselves) against evil.' This text is said to be in reference to an event during the time of David when people set traps for fish before the Sabbath and came at the end of the Sabbath to gather the catch. They were punished for this attempt at circumventing the Sabbath

.by being turned into apes. See Q۵:۶۰

The story is given more extensively in Q۷:۱۶۳ `And ask them about the town which was beside the sea; when they did exceed (the limits) in the Sabbath when their fish did come unto them on the day of their Sabbath, appearing on the surface of the water; and on the day they observed not the Sabbath, they (the fish) did not come '.unto them; Thus did We try them for they were transgressing

In Q۴:۴۷ `O ye whom the Scripture hath been given! believe in what We have sent down confirming what is (already) with you, ere We change their faces (features) and turn them towards their backs, or as We cursed the people of the Sabbath; (know ye, that) the Command of God is ever executed.' Further, Q۴:۱۵۴ `And we lifted up the Mountain over them at their covenant and said We unto them "Enter the door prostrating" and said We unto them "Exceed not (Our limits) in the Sabbath (day)" and We took from them a firm Covenant.' Ali (۱۹۸۸:۴۲۵) gives the marginal note for this .verse

Some may argue about the importance of the "Sabbath" while days are God's. The` answer is the same as would be given about the importance attached to the "Qiblah" while in all directions is God's - It is only a Test.' In this Ali does not recognize the symbolic value of the Friday-Sabbath configuration as representing the sustaining power of God. He only sees it as

a test, like the Qiblah or direction of prayer. No doubt he is right in this, and for this he has the direct witness of the Qur'an in ٧:١۶٣. But the Qiblah has been changed from time to time, whereas the Friday-Sabbath configuration has not. His remark seems to indicate that some Muslims argue for the importance of the Sabbath, whereas he .disagrees with them

In Q١۶:١٢۴ `Verily the (punishment of) the Sabbath was ordained only for those who differed about it; and verily thy Lord will judge between them on the Day of Judgement in what they used to differ about.' This text was probably addressed to the Jewish practice of Sabbath observance. The Jews recognize the death sentence of the Bible on Sabbath-breaking, and yet fail to carry it out. The Qur'an relegates the punishment for Sabbath-breaking to the Day of judgement, and furthermore only on those who differ about the Sabbath, or deny its validity. The Qur'an thus draws .together the loose ends of Bible legislation

The Friday-Sabbath configuration is best described in the Qur'an in Q۶٢:٩-١١ `O ye who believe! when the call is made for prayer on Friday, then hasten ye (all) unto the remembrance of God and leave off (all) trading, that is better for you, if ye do know! And when the Prayer is ended then disperse ye in the earth and seek ye of the grace of God, and remember ye God much, so that ye may be successful. And when see they merchandise

or sport, they break away unto it, and leave thee standing. Say thou "What is with God '".is better than sport and (better) than merchandise, and God is the Best of sustainers

The matter of Friday prayer is clear, as well as the fact that Friday itself is not a sabbath or day of rest, since trading continues up to the call for noon (dhohr) prayer. After the time of noon prayer, which according to Ali (۱۹۸۸:۱۰۵a) is `from the time the sun passes the meridian up till a little before the sunset', it is appropriate to seek the grace of God, remember God much, and avoid merchandise and sport. These four practices foster the realization that `God is the Best of sustainers.' The Qur'anic understanding of the Friday-Sabbath configuration thus appears to be very much in .accordance with the Bible understanding before it

Since the Qur'an relegates punishment for Sabbath breaking to the Day of judgement, and since there is no provision for recuperating Sabbaths missed, as with the Passover in the Bible or prayer and fasting in Islam, it is only natural that the details of Sabbath-observance have no place in Islamic Fiqh or jurisprudence. The lack of provision for recuperating missed Sabbaths means not only that no recuperation is possible, but only aspects of the Sabbath which cannot under any circumstances be missed can be declared wajib or obligatory. Only the niyat or intention itself could fall in that category, since everything else could be legitimately overridden. It is

.thus mustahab

Yet there is evidence of more extensive observance of the Sabbath in Islam in earlier times than seems presently followed. According to Islamic hadith, not only the prophet but all four rightly guided caliphs followed the practice of two units duha prayer on Sabbath mornings in the Quba mosque in Medina, and not on other mornings. An examination of the extensive hadith literature would reveal a number of other traits as well, such as Sabbath avoidance of marriage and burial if possible, because of the belief that what one does on the Sabbath will be repeated. If the Sabbath is unknown in Islam, it is mainly for not knowing Islamic traditions themselves. As Ali notes, there is some disagreement among Islamic scholars about .how important such injunctions are, but no one denies that they exist

It is finally time to ask whether there are Islamic beliefs and practices which conflict with the Bible. We have already noted that the belief that Jesus did not die on the cross almost unavoidably conflicts with the Gospel narrative. We have also mentioned the fact that the Qur'an permits the camel as both sacrifice and meat to eat, which the Bible does not permit. We have also noted that some Islamic scholars also permit the zebra, and Sunni practice permits an even larger number of both sea and land .animals forbidden in the Torah

There is but one final issue I should like to bring up. Is the Islamic use of the strict lunar calendar

an innovation or a restitution of Biblical practice? The Jewish and Christian .establishments will uncritically condemn the Islamic calendar

The Christian calendar has so far departed from the Bible that there is no need to examine it. It is a solar calendar with artificial months having more to do with the Roman emperors than with the phases of the moon. The Jewish calendar is more .problematical. Its generalized use over many centuries gives it an aura of authority

The recent conformity of Karaim Jews to the rabbinical calendar only serves to strengthen this post-biblical tradition. That the rabbinical calendar is post-biblical is clear even without a detailed examination of its history, going back to Hillel II. The fact that two thousand years ago there were several competing calendar systems within Judaism speaks for itself. All of them claimed to be Biblical, and none of them are .precisely the same as the Jewish calendar presently in use

What we need to demonstrate is not the details of postbiblical calendars in use among Jews and Christians in different eras, but whether or not the Islamic calendar can be defended on the basis of the Bible, and whether it can be shown to have been in use in .early times. Surprisingly enough, both are easy to do

The Islamic calendar consists of twelve lunar months in one year, established by the sighting of the moon. The Jewish calendar adds a thirteenth month on certain years and does not rely absolutely on the sighting of the moon

for the beginning of each month. What we need to establish is that the Bible mentions .only twelve months, and that the months are established by the sighting of the moon

The Islamic calendar can be defended on the basis of the fact that out of the scores of dates mentioned in the Bible, including all twelve months of the year, there is no date for any event during a thirteenth month. The thirteenth month is completely unknown to the Biblical record of dates. If the adjustment to the solar calendar by a thirteenth month was accepted practice in Biblical times, there should be a mention in justification of the practice or at least a date using it. There is neither. There is no mention of a thirteenth month, so we are justified in assuming a year of twelve .months for the Biblical year

There are a few texts in the Bible mentioning the new moon, but Psalm ۸۱:۳ is most important for establishing the process of sighting and broadcasting the arrival of the new moon. `Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day.' The necessity for giving the signal shows that the new moon was .established not by any calculation, but by sight

Clearly, Islam has added a few features to the Biblical faith and we have discussed these in more or less detail as they appeared. There seem to be several important innovations. Among these are the strict lunar calendar, fasting in

Ramadhan, the Qiblah (direction of prayer) and pilgrimage to Mecca, the pilgrimage and sacrifice in the twelfth month, limitation of the number of wives to four, Friday congregation, slight differences in laws of marriage and inheritance, and permission to eat camel. A closer examination shows that even some of these, regard for Friday, the strictly lunar calendar, and pilgrimage in the twelfth month, and fasting in the .ninth, are merely reforms going back to the Bible

Conclusions

We have looked at all of the basic teachings of Islam and many of the basic practices. We find that all of them are clearly and abundantly taught throughout the Bible. I daresay Christianity would be hard put to find in the Bible as much justification for its .teachings and practices

The Trinity, the Atonement, the transubstantiation, ecclesiastical hierarchy, Church authority, the observance of Christmas, Easter and other Christian festivals, all require amazing leaps of logic in interpretation to gain any support from the Christian Scriptures. In contrast, Islamic beliefs and practices naturally arise from the .expressions of the text

We have examined the Bible from the point of view of all five pillars of Islamic belief and practice as expressed in Sunni Islam. It is possible to justify, sometimes in the smallest detail, these beliefs and practices. The unity of God, the prophets including Muhammad, the sacred Scriptures, angels and the resurrection for the Day of judgement are all maintainable, sometimes with a very high rate of success. The practices of prayer in

.prostration, alms, fasting, and pilgrimage are clearly defensible from the Bible text

The special doctrines of Shi'ism also hold true when examined from the Bible. The justice of God, divine guidance, and the middle way between determinism and free will can all be defended, although the latter has had as varied a theological history in Christianity as it has had in Islam, and many passages in both the Bible and the Qur'an could be interpreted to defend either determinism or free will. Striking parallels to the .Shi'ite Imamate have been seen to exist in the Bible

Aside from the Islamic basics, many details of faith and practice are maintained by the Christian Scriptures. Among these are many details of marriage, divorce, animal sacrifice, purity, diet laws, circumcision, purity, and even prostration on earth substance. Such things as the witness by two men or two women and one man appear. The Islamic practices of raising the hands and saying `Allahu Akbar', the expressions `Assalaamu Alaykum' or `Peace to you', and `in sha Allah', `if God wills', .are all Biblical traditions

The Bible not only supports Islamic beliefs and practices, but does so consistently. There is relatively little in the Bible that is offensive to Muslim eyes, and most such things are offensive because they have been given a Christian interpretation, or because of linguistic and cultural changes that make them less understandable than .they originally were

Islam is based, not on the Bible, but on the Qur'an, Islamic tradition, and the example of the

.Prophet and, in the case of Shi'ites, on the example of the twelve holy Imams

The similarities between the Bible and Islam are explained to believers by the fact that the same God inspired both, and to researchers by the fact that both Qur'an and the Bible are products of Middle Eastern monotheism. All of the great principles of Islam are clearly evident in the earlier Scriptures as they remain in our hands today, .encumbered as they may be with the ravages of time

About center

In the name of Allah

هَلْيَسْتَوِيالَّذِينَيَعْلَمُونَوَالَّذِينَلَايَعْلَمُونَ

?Are those who know equal to those who do not know

al-Zumar: ٩

:Introduction

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan, from ٢٠٠٧, under the authority of Ayatollah Haj SayyedHasanFaqihImami (God blesses his soul), by sincere and daily efforts of university and seminary elites and sophisticated groups began its activities .in religious, cultural and scientific fields

:Manifesto

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan in order to facilitate and accelerate the accessibility of researchers to the books and tools of research, in the field of Islamic science, and regarding the multiplicity and dispersion of active centers in this field

and numerous and inaccessible sources by a mere scientific intention and far from any kind of social, political, tribal and personal prejudices and currents, based on performing a project in the shape of (management of produced and published works from all Shia centers) tries to provide a rich and free collection of books and research papers for the experts, and helpful contents and discussions for the educated generation and all classes of people interested in reading, with various formats in the .cyberspace

:Our Goals are

(propagating the culture and teachings of Thaqalayn (Quran and Ahlulbayt p.b.u.t-

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replacing useful contents with useless ones in the cellphones, tablets and computers-

providing services for seminary and university researchers-

spreading culture study in the publich-

paving the way for the publications and authors to digitize their works-

:Policies

acting according to the legal licenses-

relationship with similar centers-

avoiding parallel working-

merely presenting scientific contents-

mentioning the sources-

.It's obvious that all the responsibilities are due to the author

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:Appreciation

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